Employee Internal Communication Satisfaction in *eThekwini Municipality*: A Neo-Institutional Theory (NIT) Perspective of the Post-2016 Municipal Elections Period (March -June 2017)

by

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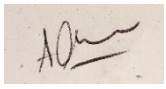
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DECLARATION

I, *Ms Ashiya Osman (previously Abdool Satar),* Student number: 33094144, declare that "*Employee Internal Communication Satisfaction in eThekwini Municipality: A Neo-Institutional Theory (NIT) Perspective of the Post-2016 Municipal Elections Period (March -June 2017)"* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



05 February 2026

Signature **Date**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a retrospective analysis of the internal communication satisfaction at *eThekwini Municipality* in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa, immediately following the 2016 municipal elections. This period represents a significant juncture shaped by the transformed political and administrative environment post-2016. It underscores the influence of the institutional environment on internal communication processes during this crucial turning point in South African local government, arguing that public organisations are communicatively constituted. As key local government institutions responsible for service delivery, municipalities occupy an important position within South Africa's governance framework (CoGTA 2025; Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2023; CoGTA 2021b; CoGTA 2018; Republic of South Africa 1996). However, despite the importance placed on optimum municipal performance, inadequate attention has been directed to internal organisational communication within local government organisations, even though internal communication satisfaction has been linked to job satisfaction and productivity in the literature.

In the South African context, there have been great displays of dissatisfaction with the services local government organisations render, which citizens and employees have expressed through protest action in various parts of the country (Dawood 2025; Vallabh, & Mxunyelwa 2022; Booysen 2021; Magubane 2021; Ndasana, Ngcamu 2019; Wasserman, Chuma & Bosch 2018). It is for this reason that national government has begun to direct greater attention to municipal performance, legislatively ensuring that all municipalities adhere to comparatively stringent and austere regulations and audits, with the possibility of wide-scale investigations into municipal maladministration that may have equally unfavourable consequences for municipal administrators. This context was significantly exacerbated by the 2016 municipal elections, which introduced pervasive institutional uncertainty and political turbulence across key metropolitan areas, notably within eThekwini Municipality. Therefore, internal communication satisfaction is a germane concept to explore, both theoretically and empirically, within local government organisations.

Positioned within this void, this study proposes a multilevel and multidisciplinary approach to understanding the internal organisational communication satisfaction of local government organisations operating within a highly regulated institutional context and highlights how internal communication can be approached strategically in this context. Therefore, this multidisciplinary and multilevel study is, firstly, based on a sound and rigorous literature review, focusing on relevant theories that provide insight into the influence that the institutional context of public sector organisations may have on internal communication satisfaction, beginning with neo-

institutional theory (NIT), the meta-theory of this research, and leading up to communication satisfaction literature. Subsequently, the empirical research of the study was implemented at a South African metropolitan municipality, the *eThekwini Municipality,* post-2016 municipal elections, and comprised qualitative interviews and a quantitative questionnaire. While there was some variation in the results, the overall findings revealed a pattern of employee dissatisfaction across the eight dimensions of communication satisfaction. They further demonstrated that communication satisfaction was influenced by the institutional environment and the implementation of communication practices within the municipality.

This study, thus, provides a neoteric contribution to the field of internal organisational communication, with a specific focus on local government organisations in a South African context during a time of unprecedented political disruption, indicating a move towards a more competitive and fragmented political landscape.

KEYWORDS

internal organisational communication; internal communication; employee communication; neo-institutional theory (NIT); organisational institutionalism; organisational culture; organisational climate; public administration; multidisciplinary approach; multilevel approach; South African municipalities; local government institutions; local government organisations; public sector organisations; internal communication satisfaction; communication satisfaction; job satisfaction; local government; eThekwini Municipality; 2016 municipal elections, metropolitan municipalities, ANC reign; The Political-Administrative (P-A) disruption

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis presents a retrospective analysis of the internal communication satisfaction at eThekwini Municipality in the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa during the March-September 2017 period, which was an unsettling time of unprecedented transition for the municipality following the pivotal 2016 municipal elections. This period represents a seminal shift in the political and administrative environment post-2016. It provides insight into the influence of the institutional environment on internal communication processes during this period of heightened volatility within South African local government, thus arguing that public organisations are communicatively constituted. Public organisations are supra-organisations that operate within highly regulated landscapes and contend with varying institutional and organisational pressures, due to their level of accountability to the public and the government. Municipalities in South Africa are public organisations that form part of the local government sector. Insight into employees' satisfaction levels in communicatively constituted local government organisations functioning in unpredictable institutional environments helps identify and address communication barriers in this sector. This study, thus, offers unique insight into the way in which political transitions and administrative shifts can either impede or enable effective communication, and ultimately, service delivery effectiveness as observed during that specific time.

The focus is on gauging the communication satisfaction of employees in *eThekwini municipality,* one of the largest metropolitan municipalities in the country, after the 2016 local government elections. The unanticipated electoral outcome changed the political landscape of South Africa. Although the ANC retained its control of the *eThekwini municipality* with a significantly lower following, it was the first time since 1994 that the ruling African National Congress (ANC) lost control of four of the eight metro municipalities, indicating a shift in power and politics in the country (Xaba 2023; Ritchie 2021; Mkhabela, H. 2016). This study, thus, provides a unique insight into employee communication satisfaction at this particular juncture of change and disruption in local government, emphasising the influence of the institutional environment on internal communication practices, which is the focus of this thesis. Studying past events, particularly disruptive occurrences in governance, provides great insight and knowledge into the future and a baseline for longitudinal comparative studies of public organisations within their institutional context.

The 2016 municipal election marked a period of transition in South African local government, representing the start of coalition governments in hung municipalities, including *eThekwini Municipality* in 2021 (Lowe 2022). The election result was an indicator of public sentiment

towards the ruling African National Congress (ANC) that signalled a transition in SA's politics and marked the baseline shift of the ANC's waning reign in local government. Hence, this study gauges the communication satisfaction of employees in one of the biggest metros in South Africa at a point where the ANC managed to retain its stronghold by a narrow margin. The ANC witnessed significant losses in the subsequent municipal elections in 2021, moving to a coalition government (The Witness 2021). The upcoming 2026 municipal elections forecast greater political disruptions amid the volatile mechanics of the Government of National Unity (GNU). All these arguments point to the critical juncture of the 2016 municipal elections for the dominion of the ANC in eThekwini Municipality.

Even though there has been persistent coverage of poor organisational output in municipalities in South Africa, studies that investigate the internal communication practices within local government organisations receive inadequate consideration (Raymond 2020; Lappeman & Neethling 2017; Lehohla 2017:1; Mnguni 2016; 'SA municipalities' 2016; Smith 2016; Hines 2014; Mafini & Pooe 2013:1; Maqeda & Makombe 2013:197; Stromback & Kiousis 2011:8; MacLeod & Clarke 2009:36; Pandey & Garnett 2006:42). It is of interest to note that the organisational communication landscape reveals a skewed focus on internal communication in the corporate (private) and government (public) sectors, which can be attributed to the extensive regulative frameworks that restrain the activities of public organisations more than their private counterparts (Boddy-Evans 2020; Raymond 2020; Bente 2013:1720; DeIonno, Cokayne, Pressly & Khuzwayo 2013; Sanders & Canel 2013:8; Liu, Horsley & Levenshus 2010:209; MacLeod & Clarke 2009:36; Pandey & Garnett 2006:42; Fletcher 1999:45). This study aims to address this gap and argues that the theoretical interest and practical application of employee communication within the public sector be embraced with equal vigour, as is the case in the corporate sector.

The aim of this is to look at the intrinsic communication satisfaction of public organisations against the backdrop of the institutional environment within which they operate and to create cognisance of the importance of effective employee communications within local government. According to neo-institutional theory (NIT) scholarship, organisations functioning in extremely regulated contexts are not necessarily autonomous. They are bound by institutional dynamics, and it is this aspect that distinguishes NIT from general notions of the importance of organisational environments (Boddy-Evans 2020; Drori 2020:7; Bitektine & Haack 2015:49; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:153; Meyer & Rowan 1977:341). The argument put forward in this thesis, thus, is that these institutional dynamics have a bearing on their internal organisational communication practices and subsequently on their internal communication satisfaction, thus denoting the postulation of the communicative constitution of public organisations. The post-2016 period provides a pertinent

highlight of the bearing of the institutional environment on internal communication satisfaction, as this represented a crucial turning point in local government in South Africa.

Consequently, for the purposes of this study, a consideration of the influence of the institutional context and sectoral delineation of public organisations in a multilevel and multidisciplinary analysis is important in developing a holistic understanding of the internal organisational communication practices of public organisations, both in general, and in the *eThekwini Municipality* in the post-2016 municipal elections period in particular.

Therefore, to begin, this introductory chapter provides the contextualisation of this study within the domain of public sector organisations. Then, the research problem and questions for this research, the theoretical, epistemological, and methodological approaches followed are presented, before putting forth the chapter demarcation for this thesis. Before this is done, however, important terms relevant to this study are operationalised within the bounds of this research.

1.1.1 The theoretical and conceptual framework: A multilevel and multidisciplinary approach

This study adopts a multilevel and multidisciplinary theoretical framework, drawing on neo-institutional theory (NIT), public administration literature, the communicative constitution of organisations (CCO) perspective, and communication satisfaction literature. NIT provides the overarching theoretical lens through which the institutional environment of local government organisations is understood, while public administration literature offers insight into the bureaucratic and administrative characteristics of public sector entities. CCO and communication satisfaction literature provide a communication-focused perspective on organisational processes and employee communication experiences. Together, these perspectives form the analytical basis for examining employee internal communication satisfaction within the institutional context of eThekwini Municipality. A detailed discussion of the theoretical and conceptual framework is presented in Chapter 3.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Municipalities fall into the public sector category of organisations that function within a highly regulated environment. The problem is that the pronounced regulation of public sector organisations promotes an environment of excessive bureaucratic organisation that can create barriers to effective internal communication, which is an important element of job satisfaction and

productivity. This study thus aims to investigate this problem, both theoretically and empirically, to understand the communication processes in public organisations that function within highly regulated environments, thereby gaining insight into internal communication satisfaction within an institutional context, which has not been done in previous studies (see Bannerman & Haggart 2015:2; Abugre 2011:8; Hyden 2010:83; Sandhu 2009:75; Scott 2008:5; Scott & Meyer 1994:31). This is done through a multi-dimensional approach that deems the internal communication of public organisations as an interrelated component of environmental influences, which needs to be considered when drafting internal communication improvement plans in this sector.

The following sub-sections provide the necessary governance context and justification for the study's focus on the 2017 administrative crisis. Beginning with the establishment of the Political-Administrative (P-A) Stability Baseline (Section 1.2.2), this analysis proceeds to define the acute P-A disruption and articulate the pertinence of the critical study period (Section 1.2.3), thereby establishing the empirical foundation for the subsequent investigation.

1.2.1 The foundational context of local government organisations in South Africa and the *eThekwini Municipality*

For this study, the discussions begin with a delineation of the contextual environment of public organisations in terms of the macro, meso, and micro levels of functioning and the regulative structures that govern them. This discussion situates the research contextually and progresses with the discussion of relevant and related institutional policy documents in Chapter 2 so as to ascertain the central policies that regulate the structure and functioning of local government organisations in South Africa and the *eThekwini Municipality* in particular. As per the focus of this study, the thesis presents a discussion of the policies that are delimited to those that directly influence the structuration of public organisations in the local government sector, particularly to the extent of influencing their organisational culture and internal communication processes. Therefore, for this study, the following national policies are discussed when delineating the context of local government organisations in South Africa:

- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 (South Africa 1996)
    - The White Paper on Local Government (1998) (South Africa 1998b)
    - Municipal Demarcation Act (Act 27 of 1998) (South Africa 1998a)
    - Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 (South Africa 2009)
    - Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 (South Africa 2012)

The general discussion of the institutional context progresses to the specific discussions of the policies and procedures that influence the structure and functioning of the *eThekwini Municipality,* specifically to encapsulate its internal functioning protocols in relation to the national regulations.

1.2.2 The eThekwini Municipality's institutional baseline (pre-2016)

Prior to the 2016 local government elections, eThekwini Municipality maintained a relative degree of Political-Administrative (P-A) stability. This period, under the leadership of Mayor James Nxumalo and a consistent administrative head, serves as the essential institutional benchmark for the city's governance. During this time, the municipality largely adhered to the P-A separation mandated by legislation such as the Municipal Systems Act, 32 of 2000 (Republic of South Africa 2012). The political environment, defined by the ANC's uncontested political dominance, was critical to this stability, as it contained macro-political turbulence and reduced the risk of internal divergence and coalition governance. A dichotomy operated with a level of independence that allowed professional administrators to enforce controls and maintain procedural integrity. While governance challenges certainly existed, as is typical in any large metro, the municipality achieved functional service delivery performance and operated with a controlled environment that provided a crucial point of contrast to the ensuing volatility (CoGTA 2022). This relative stability highlights a period where the foundational institutional framework was largely respected, underscoring the severity of the subsequent disruption.

1.2.3 Justification of the critical study period (March 2017-September 2017)

The P-A stability established in the baseline period discussed in section 1.2.2 was fundamentally challenged following the 2016 electoral transition, justifying the focus on the March 2017–September 2017 window as the initiation phase of the governance crisis. This period was characterised by extreme macro-political factionalism that immediately translated into administrative disruption, resulting in the intense P-A disruption. The unstable executive relationship between the newly elected Mayor, Zandile Gumede and the newly appointed City Manager, Sipho Nzuza precipitated the crisis (appointed March 2017). This collapse in the executive leadership relationship is cited as the crucial point where the political sphere decisively violated the P-A dichotomy and initiated crisis-level governance failures (Mabunda, Mvunabandi & Chonco 2023:643). This executive instability resulted in the abrupt attrition of experienced senior management (CoGTA 2022), leading to a rapid contraction of institutional capacity and the systematic collapse of the micro-administrative environment's controls. The severe consequences of this initial rupture are documented by the subsequent reputational damage (SACN 2021:7) and the continuing challenge posed by the "negative influence of politics" on technical decision-making (Moodley 2019:316). The clear, functional contrast between the P-A stability baseline and the dramatic systemic breakdown observed within this concentrated six-month window renders the critical study period highly pertinent.

1.3. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The research problem outlines the issue to be investigated and the delineation of the research focus (Bryman 2019:100; Shuttleworth 2018, Walliman 2006:67). As the general research question is broad, it is broken down into objectives, sub-problems and specific research questions that enable the researcher to undertake the study more systematically, so as to understand the problem holistically through practicable investigation (Pardede 2018; Bryman 2016:78; Kumar 2014:46; Creswell 2009:101; Walliman 2006:33). Thus, the research problem is succinctly summarised below, before outlining the research problem statement, general research question, sub-problems, and specific research questions in the subsequent sub-sections.

The integrity and functional capacity of public organisations are fundamentally dependent on the stability of the Political-Administrative (P-A) dichotomy. As established in the background, the eThekwini Municipality experienced an acute P-A disruption following the 2016 municipal elections, characterised by severe macro-political interference that led to the collapse of the micro-administrative environment's controls (Mabunda et al., 2023). While the systemic governance failures resulting from this institutional shock are well-documented, the bearing of such coercive institutional pressures on the internal communication environment, specifically the methods, strategy, and practices used by the municipality to maintain internal coherence, remains under-investigated. Consequently, there is a critical academic and practical gap in understanding how institutional stability, compromised by acute political interference, influences a public organisation's internal communication effectiveness.

Although previous studies have examined internal communication effectiveness and communication satisfaction in public sector organisations, limited attention has been given to the influence of institutional disruption and political administrative instability on employees' communication experiences within metropolitan municipalities. The significance of this gap and the contribution of the present study are discussed in Sections 1.5 and 1.6, respectively, with a detailed review of the relevant literature presented in Chapter 3.

This study, therefore, employs a neo-institutional theory (NIT) perspective to address this gap, focusing specifically on the post-2016 period at eThekwini Municipality. The central problem is to assess how the volatile institutional backdrop described in Section 1.2.3 influenced the internal communication landscape and, ultimately, to determine employees' levels of communication satisfaction in relation to this profound disruption.

This study, approached from a neo-institutional theory (NIT) perspective, employs a pragmatic-interpretive approach in this cross-sectional study, using both qualitative and quantitative means to describe the bearing that contextual forces, such as the institutional environment have on the internal communication methods, strategy and practices, of public organisations in general and at the *eThekwini Municipality* in particular, during the post-2016 municipal election period (March-September 2017), through contextual, theoretical and conceptual, as well as empirical investigation, with the ultimate aim of assessing employees' levels of communication satisfaction at this organisation in relation to its institutional backdrop.

1.3.1 General research question

The general research question for this thesis, which stems from the research problem statement stated above, is:

Through contextual, theoretical, and conceptual, as well as empirical enquiry, what insight can be gained into the bearing that forces, such as the institutional environment, have on the internal communication processes of public organisations and employees' satisfaction with the internal communication within public organisations in general and at the *eThekwini Municipality* specifically during the post-2016 municipal election period (March-September 2017)?

1.3.2 Research purpose, aims, and objectives

The section below outlines the research purpose, aims, and objectives under the umbrella of the overall research purpose. These research aims arise from the context and overall purpose of the study, elucidated in the previous section, to address the identified void.

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the influence of the institutional environment on internal communication processes and employees' communication satisfaction within eThekwini Municipality. To achieve this purpose, the study is structured around research aims and specific objectives.

Basic communication research is conducted in order to investigate issues of a theoretical nature that add to the theoretical body of knowledge applicable to a field of study, while applied communication research refers to a study where practical issues are investigated, with the specific aim of deriving practical solutions to a "real-world problem" (Kumar 2019:91; Bordens & Abbott 2014:5; Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter 2008:57). The aims of this study are,

therefore, two-fold: firstly, basic communication research and secondly, applied communication research.

The main aim of this study is to unpack the existing literature succinctly and coherently to provide insight into the influence of contextual forces on the internal communication processes of public organisations, culminating in a proposed theoretical model to investigate internal communication satisfaction within organisations in this sector. Basic communication research is therefore understood as the first aim of this study, namely, to generate theory by developing an understanding of the internal communication satisfaction of public organisations using a multilevel and multidisciplinary approach; to then apply this knowledge in the unique context of South African local government organisations.

Subsequently, this investigation has an applied research focus on generating practical solutions to guide and enhance future internal communication policies and practices at the *eThekwini Municipality* during a period of disruption, by empirically investigating the levels of communication satisfaction therein against its institutional backdrop. In doing so, the study generates original empirical evidence on internal communication satisfaction within a South African metropolitan municipality, contributing to a relatively underexplored area of organisational communication research.

Hence, this study will provide vital information to key decision-makers in the *eThekwini Municipality* concerning its internal communication practices. The applied aim is to generate findings that can inform communication strategies, policy, and management practices in local government organisations facing similar disruptions. Hence, this study not only advances theoretical insight it also offers practical guidance for municipal governance and communication management.

In addition to the two aims outlined above, the objective of the study is descriptive. Descriptive research focuses on describing the characteristics of situations, organisations, or experiences by describing phenomena and the relationships between important characteristics of a phenomenon under investigation (Bhasin 2019; Kumar 2019:13; Hale 2018, Jackson 2009:16; Terre Blanche et al. 2008:57; Babbie & Mouton 2003:81). Thus, this study aims to describe the institutional and contextual environment of public organisations with a view of understanding the bearing this has on internal communication processes.

The overall aim of this study is to gain insight into the bearing that the institutional environment has on the internal communication processes and employee satisfaction within eThekwini

Municipality. To achieve this general aim, the following specific objectives will be met, aligning directly with the multi-level structure of the research questions:

Objective 1: Macro-Institutional Context

To establish the theoretical and empirical institutional context of South African local government, and its bearing on administrative management, by achieving the following:

- to determine, through a review of neoinstitutional theory (NIT) literature, the defining characteristics of the institutional environment and its bearing on the management of internal communication in public organisations,
- to map the specific regulative and legislative environment within which the eThekwini Municipality operates, and
- to empirically define the acute Political-Administrative (P-A) disruption following the 2016 municipal elections at eThekwini Municipality, thereby providing the benchmark for the study.

Objective 2: Meso-Organisational Culture

To establish the theoretical and empirical characteristics of organisational culture and its relationship with internal communication, by achieving the following:

- to determine, through a review of relevant literature, the organisational culture of public organisations within which local municipalities function,
- to analyse the bearing that this theoretical organisational culture has on the strategic approach and management of internal communication in public organisations generally, and
- to empirically define the organisational culture and its bearing on the management of internal communication within the administrative environment of eThekwini Municipality during the acute disruption period (March to September 2017).

Objective 3: Micro-Internal Communication and Satisfaction

To establish the theoretical and empirical status of internal communication and employee satisfaction, by achieving the following:

- to determine, through a review of relevant literature, how internal communication and communication satisfaction are strategically approached and managed in public organisations,
- to empirically define the methods and practices by which internal communication was managed within the administrative environment of eThekwini Municipality during the acute disruption period (March–September 2017), and

- to measure and document the level of employee satisfaction at the eThekwini Municipality with its internal communication and report the association between the communication practices defined in Step 2 and the measured levels of satisfaction.

1.3.3 Specific sub-problems and research questions

The objectives outlined in Section 1.3.2 are operationalised through sub-problems and related research questions that guide the structure of this thesis. The following sub-problems generated the research questions that guided the rest of the thesis and its chapters. These are discussed in related sets below. Sub-problems 1-3 address the research problem contextually, theoretically, conceptually, and empirically as they provide a holistic overview of the research problem. Consistent with the multilevel theoretical and conceptual framework underpinning the research, the sub-problems and related research questions are organised across three interrelated levels of analysis. Sub-problem 1 focuses on the macro-institutional environment within which local government organisations function; Sub-problem 2 focuses on the meso-level organisational culture of public organisations; and Sub-problem 3 focuses on micro-level internal communication processes and employee communication satisfaction. Together, these levels provide a holistic theoretical, conceptual, contextual, and empirical understanding of the research problem.

Table 1. 1: Sub-problems and related research questions for this study

OBJECTIVE 1: MACRO-INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT **SUB-PROBLEM 1:** *To determine the **institutional context** of public organisations theoretically, according to the literature, and empirically at eThekwini Municipality, and to determine the bearing this has on how their internal communication is managed.*
Research questions (RQ) 1.1 – 1.4 that arise from sub-problem 1:
RQ 1.1: What is the institutional context within which public organisations function? **RQ 1.2:** Within what regulative environment do local government organisations in South Africa and the *eThekwini Municipality* specifically function? **RQ 1.3:** What bearing does the institutional context have on how internal communication is managed in public organisations during periods of disruption? **RQ 1.4:** What bearing did the institutional context have on how internal communication was managed in *eThekwini Municipality* during the post-2016 municipal elections disruption (March–September 2017)??
OBJECTIVE 2: MESO-ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE **SUB-PROBLEM 2:** *To determine the characteristics of the **organisational culture** within public organisations theoretically, according to the literature, and empirically at eThekwini Municipality, and to determine the bearing this has on their internal communication.*
Research questions (RQ) 2.1 – 2.3 that arise from sub-problem 2 :
RQ 2.1: What is the organisational culture of public organisations within which local municipalities function? **RQ 2.2:** What bearing does the organisational culture have on how internal communication is managed in public organisations? **RQ 2.3:** What bearing does the organisational culture have on how internal communication is managed in *eThekwini Municipality* during the post-2016 municipal elections disruption (March to September 2017)?

OBJECTIVE 3: MICRO-INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND SATISFACTION **SUB-PROBLEM 3:** *To determine how internal communication is managed in public organisations theoretically, according to the literature, and empirically at eThekwini Municipality, and to determine the level of satisfaction of employees at the eThekwini Municipality with the internal communication.*
Research questions (RQ) 3.1 – 3.3 that arise from sub-problem 3:
RQ 3.1: How are internal communication and communication satisfaction managed in public organisations? **RQ 3.2:** How was internal communication managed at *eThekwini Municipality* during the post-2016 municipal elections disruption (March–September 2017)? **RQ 3.3:** What was the level of satisfaction of employees at the *eThekwini Municipality* with its internal communication during the post-2016 municipal elections disruption (March to September 2017)?

The next section proceeds with a discussion of the research goals and objectives of this study.

1.3.4 Research strategies per research question

The following table outlines the approach followed in addressing the research questions contextually, theoretically, conceptually, and empirically. The development of the theoretical, conceptual, and contextual frameworks underpins the empirical segment of the study. Hence, the objectives, which are broken down into sub-problems, and research questions, also progress from the theoretical, conceptual, and contextual aspects to the empirical component of the research and are thus presented as such in the subsequent table. The discussion of the different aspects of the empirical study follows the table.

Table 1.2: Research strategies per research question

OBJECTIVE 1: MACRO-INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT **SUB-PROBLEM 1:** *To determine the **institutional context** of public organisations theoretically, according to the literature, and empirically at eThekwini Municipality, and to determine the bearing this has on how their internal communication is managed.*					
RESEARCH QUESTION	**CHAPTER**	**ORIENTATION**	**FOCUS**	**APPROACH**	**STRATEGY**
RQ 1.1	3	Theoretical and conceptual	Understand the institutional context of public sector organisations	Literature review	
RQ 1.2	2	Contextual	Describe the regulative environment of public organisations in South Africa and the *eThekwini Municipality* specifically	Review of relevant and related policy documents	
RQ 1.3	3	Theoretical and conceptual	Understand the bearing of the institutional context on internal communication in public organisations	Literature review	
RQ 1.4	5	Empirical	Explore and describe the bearing of the institutional context on internal communication in *eThekwini Municipality*		One-on-one interviews with managers [Qualitative]

OBJECTIVE 2: MESO-ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

SUB-PROBLEM 2:
*To determine the characteristics of the **organisational culture** within public organisations theoretically, according to the literature, and empirically at eThekwini Municipality, and to determine the bearing this has on their internal communication.*

RESEARCH QUESTION	CHAPTER	ORIENTATION	FOCUS	APPROACH	STRATEGY
RQ 2.1	3	Theoretical and conceptual	Understand the organisational culture of public organisations	Literature review	
RQ 2.2	3	Theoretical and conceptual	Understand the bearing of organisational culture on internal communication in public organisations	Literature review	
RQ 2.3	5	Empirical	Explore and describe the bearing of org culture on internal communication in *eThekwini Municipality*		One-on-one interviews with managers [Qualitative]

OBJECTIVE 3: MICRO-INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND SATISFACTION

SUB-PROBLEM 3:
To determine how internal communication is managed in public organisations theoretically, according to the literature, and empirically at eThekwini Municipality, and to determine the level of satisfaction of employees at the eThekwini Municipality with the internal communication.

RESEARCH QUESTION	CHAPTER	ORIENTATION	FOCUS	APPROACH	STRATEGY
RQ 3.1	3	Theoretical and conceptual	Understand internal communication processes in public organisations	Literature review	
RQ 3.2	2	Contextual	Describe the internal communication policies and processes at *eThekwini Municipality*	Review of relevant and related policy documents	
RQ 3.3	5	Empirical	Assess and describe the communication satisfaction levels at the *eThekwini Municipality*		Survey - Questionnaires (CSQ) [Quantitative] One-on-one interviews with managers [Qualitative]

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Improved municipal performance has become an increasingly important national imperative in South Africa in view of the dissatisfaction of internal and external stakeholders exhibited through recurrent mass protests in recent years (Nciweni 2024:117; Tshwane 2020; Duval 2017; Lappeman & Neethling 2017; Lehohla 2017:1; Mnguni 2016; 'SA municipalities' 2016; Smith 2016; Hines, 2014; Mafini & Pooe 2013:1; Maqeda & Makombe 2013:197; Randall 2012). This demand for improved organisational output and greater accountability places local government structures under continuous public scrutiny and has forced national government to legislatively address the challenges faced by municipalities (Tshwane 2020; Lappeman & Neethling 2017; Lehohla 2017:1; Omarjee 2017; Bhardwaj 2016; Barnard 2013; South Africa 2012; South Africa 2009; South Africa 1996). Surprisingly, though, the issue of internal communication within municipalities receives inadequate consideration in this national imperative, even though organisational communication literature links internal communication to job satisfaction and productivity (Luoma-aho & Canel 2020:2; Vuori, Aher & Kylänen 2020:116; Terry 2019; Bhardwaj 2016; D'Aprix 2011:267; Gillis 2011:210; Alexander 2010: 29; COGTA 2009:70; Rhee 2004:14).

Moreover, the traditionally inflexible bureaucratic organisational structures of government enterprises could also encumber effective internal communication practices and hamper employees' communication satisfaction. Subsequently, poor communication satisfaction amongst employees could lead to a dwindling sense of engagement in the organisation, waning job performance and reduced organisational output (Barnett 2020; Harrison 2020; Terry 2019; MacLeod & Clark 2009:135; Pandey & Garnett 2006:40). Notably, internal communication is a vital component of organisational health, which has been recognised by the corporate world, but has yet to gain equivalent importance in the public sector (Luoma-aho, Olkkonen & Canel 2020:305; Walker & Andrews 2015:104; MacLeod & Clarke 2009:52; Pandey & Garnett 2006:37; Kim 2002:231). As a result, a clear need is observed to approach internal communication as a strategic goal of any organisation functioning in local government, not only because their employees' job satisfaction and productivity are related thereto, but also due to the important function that local government serves in society. However, from the perspective of this study, this cannot be done without highlighting the institutional environment of organisations in this sector that binds them to regulative and legislative standards of operation. This research, therefore, aims to address this need through contextual, theoretical, and conceptual, as well as empirical investigation.

1.6 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

In the deliberations presented thus far, the importance of internal communication in local government organisations was articulated. The importance of effective communication with and between employees in the organisational system, therefore, cannot be underestimated in this sector (Heath, Johansen & Sandhu 2018; David 2011:75; Welch & Jackson 2007:183; Bauer 2004:14; Rhee 2004:4). Hence, conducting an internal communication audit of a local municipality would reveal employees' communication satisfaction levels within a highly institutionalised context, and would also prompt further similar studies within local government entities in South Africa. The significance of this study is embedded in the fact that the internal communication of public organisations is approached as an interrelated component of institutional pressures, particularly after the disruptive 2016 municipal elections, which ought to be considered when drafting internal communication improvement plans in this sector. In this way, future studies can adopt a more focused approach to enhancing communication within public organisations that are seated in bureaucratic constitutions due to institutional requirements.

The study also points out that internal communication in public bureaucracies can be approached strategically, even within bureaucratic structuration, which stimulates further research in this area. Moreover, despite the recent growth in the juxtaposition between NIT and organisational communication scholarship, this research hails predominantly from Western countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, and Canada, signifying a dearth of scholarship from African and Asian countries (Abugre 2011:8; Hyden 2010:83; Scott 2008:5; Scott & Meyer 1994:31). This gap suggests a viable area for African scholars to pursue, particularly considering the intersection between NIT, public administration, and organisational communication research as enthused in this study.

Despite the significant body of knowledge generated by organisational communication scholars, little information has been generated to explain the trends in the structuring and functioning of public organisations, therefore a NIT lens for communication scholars to study the formal and informal communication structures of public organisations is suggested (Heath et al. 2018; Bannerman & Haggart 2015:2; Suddaby, Seidl & Lê 2013:330; Sandhu 2009:75). Furthermore, although some research has been conducted in the area of internal communication in the public sector in South Africa (*see* for example Waititu & Du Plessis 2022; Sison 2020; Mbhele 2016; Tumbare 2009; Walt 2006; Holtzhausen 2002), none has been conducted within a multilevel and multidisciplinary approach. The main contribution of this study is, therefore, to add to the field of organisational communication literature by offering a multidimensional approach, both

theoretically and empirically, to understanding and analysing internal communication in this sector, proposing a model to approach the study of internal communication in public organisations. The empirical contribution of the study lies in its generation of original evidence on internal communication satisfaction within a highly institutionalised South African local government environment during a period of political-administrative disruption. It can therefore be established that the current study is unique, with a clearly distinguished purpose that will add value to the limited body of knowledge that exists within the field of internal organisational communication in the public sector in general, with pronounced emphasis on local government organisations in the South African context.

1.7 THE RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The research approach for this pragmatic-interpretivist study utilises a concurrent mixed methods design.

1.7.1 Epistemological and ontological approach

Ontology and epistemology form the basic foundation of research and determine how the study is approached. Ontology concerns the view of reality, while epistemology concerns the approach used to acquire this knowledge of reality (Saunders et al. 2009:10). As such, this study is approached from a pragmatic-interpretivistic stance. The epistemological approach taken for this study is pragmatic, while the ontological approach is interpretivist in nature. The interpretivist ontological stance frames an exploration of the underlying perceptions and subjective meanings people attach to their experience of the world (Kułakowska 2020:34; Goldkuhl 2012:137; Verhoeven 2011:32). In terms of this study, an interpretivist ontological stance acknowledges that employees in local government organisations assign meaning to internal communication based on their experience and their interpretation of that experience in the organisation within its specific context and the study is thus approached as such.

From an epistemological perspective, the interpretation and reporting of this interpretivist reality is undertaken pragmatically. Pragmatism encourages seeking knowledge through a variety of approaches that would suitably address the range of research questions, as multiple approaches provide a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Clarke & Visser 2019:456; Frey 2018:1287; Shields 2008:211). This means that the research questions guide the techniques that the researcher uses to obtain knowledge about public employees' communication experiences, indicating that all appropriate methods will be utilised to address the research problem practically in the quest for detailed and thorough findings (Kułakowska

2020:34; Goldkuhl 2012:137; Bryman 2011:518; Creswell 2011:10; Shields 2008:206). This pragmatic-interpretivistic stance therefore guides the entire research process and provides the guiding principles for addressing the research problem in all its aspects. The first aspect of this approach is the theoretical framework, which is outlined next, followed by the methodological approach adopted for this research.

1.7.2 The methodological approach

The methodological approach pertains to the empirical component of this study. As such, this research entailed both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, which were applied concurrently. Firstly, as discussed in the prior sub-section, a thorough literature study was conducted in order to situate the public organisation within its institutional, sectoral, and organisational contexts and to underscore the influence thereof on its internal communication satisfaction. In order to situate this theoretical analysis empirically, the following methods were employed concurrently:

An investigation of the communication satisfaction levels of employees within the institutional environment of a specific South African local government organisation, namely the *eThekwini Municipality,* during the post-2016 election period (March-September 2017) was conducted using the following methods:

- A standardised questionnaire, the communication satisfaction questionnaire (CSQ), was distributed to employees at all levels and across all clusters and units (strata) of the *eThekwini Municipality*. A standardised questionnaire ensures a valid and reliable measure of communication satisfaction, which asserts the decision to use a standardised measure in this study. Additionally, the questionnaire was administered to a sample of employees across identified strata across all levels of the municipality.

- Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers at *eThekwini Municipality*, from various organisational units. The interview data provided additional information about the institutional and organisational context of *eThekwini Municipality,* which could only be provided by employees in managerial positions who interact with the institutional environment. Additionally, detailed accounts of perceived communication satisfaction within this environment were gained, which the questionnaires would not yield.

1.8 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

In line with the contribution outlined above, the study presents certain delimitations. Firstly, although various aspects of the study could be applicable to organisations in general, the focus of this study is on public sector organisations only, and particularly within the South African context. Therefore, only aspects that relate to how public organisations function, their contextual variables, structural features, and the related influences these have on internal communication satisfaction have been considered. Secondly, the empirical part of the study is restricted to a single South African municipality and cannot be fully generalised to other local government organisations. Thematically, the research is delimited by its adherence to the neoinstitutional theory (NIT) framework, which is used to explain the Political-Administrative interface. Most critically, the study is temporally delimited to investigate the effects of the acute Political-Administrative (P-A) disruption that followed the 2016 local government elections. The empirical data collection and primary analysis are strictly confined to the defined critical window of disruption: March 2017 to September 2017. Moreover, the central focus of this study is on the communication between the organisation and its employees, specifically, as employees are at the forefront of service delivery in local government and require effective internal communication to ensure optimal productivity and organisational output.

Therefore, all discussions and arguments eventually gravitate towards internal communication. Additionally, only the aspects (policies, theories, concepts) applicable to the bureaucratic structuration of public organisations that impact relevant internal communication practices are included. Lastly, although other environmental factors could impact internal communication processes in public organisations, the focus of this study is specifically on the regulatory context that influences the structuration of these organisations. These regulative forces form the basis of all other institutional pillars evident in public organisations, which are inadvertently discussed as such.

1.9 DELINEATION AND DISCUSSION OF IMPORTANT TERMINOLOGY

The section below discusses the noteworthy terminology and lexis relevant to this study, beginning with the distinction between the terms *“organisation”* and *“institution”* as a point of departure. All other relevant concepts are then discussed and defined within the framework of this research.

1.9.1 Distinction between organisations and institutions

Firstly, within the context of this study, clarity between the terms “organisation” and “institution” is required. Although the terms organisation and institution are often used interchangeably amongst scholars, professionals, and non-professionals alike, these terms are dissimilar (Walker 2020; Boddy-Evans 2020; Lammers & Garcia 2014:200; Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin & Suddaby 2008:4; Scott 2008:87). Gortner, Mahler and Nicholson (1987:3) describe organisations as being “a collection of people engaged in specialised and interdependent activity to accomplish a goal or mission”. An organisation thus refers to a formally coordinated sequence of activities and interaction among a group of people striving towards an alignment of personal and organisational goals (Silva, Macedo & Thompson 2023:74; Nicotera 2020:22; Miller 2015:11; Hodge & Anthony 1991:8). As such, organisations generally have five discerning features that encompass extant concerns such as globalisation, environmental influences, technological advancement, and cultural diversity that impress characteristically complex variations in organisational governance (Walker 2020; Miller 2015:11; Jones 2010:24; Strati 2000:2). The five general characteristics of organisations are:

- collaboration of individuals to organise tasks,
- organisational and individual objectives,
- organisational structuration,
- management of intra-organisational activity; and
- inter-organisational interaction and embeddedness.

Institutions, on the other hand, within the context of organisational communication scholarship, refer to the intangible policies, procedures, norms, and trends that shape and guide organisational structuration and conduct, thereby promoting certain communicative activities, while constraining others, and forging behavioural patterns (Walker 2020; Cornelissen, Durand, Fiss, Lammers & Vaara 2015:10; Greenwood et al. 2008:5; Scott 2008:87). These patterns of behaviour form the backbone of organisational culture and normative practices in public organisations that shape internal communication processes, as will be discussed in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

The hybridisation of the concepts of organisation and institution occurs once institutional values filter into an organisation and are projected as standard routines and practices (Boddy-Evans 2020; Chaney & Slimane 2014:95; Lammers & Garcia 2014:196; Alvesson 2013:126; Berkley & Rouse 2009:83; Zucker 1987:446). In other words, institutions are best understood as the “rules of the game”, which shape human behaviour in economic, social, and political life, while

organisations can best be understood as “the players” that enforce these rules (Anyonge, Jonckheere, Romano, & Gallina 2013:13). Ideally, institutions warrant predictable patterns of behaviour and interaction in order to achieve a stable and anticipated reality (Boddy-Evans 2020; Schein 2010:32; Scott 2008:74; Rainey & Bozeman 2000:454; Bacharach & Aiken 1977:366). This need for a stable reality likely explains the excessive levels of formalisation in administrative and communication processes within public organisations.

1.9.1.1 Institutionalisation, deinstitutionalisation, and reinstitutionalisation

Reference was made to institutions in section 1.9.1 above. Here, the process of institutionalisation, as applicable to public organisations, is tersely discussed. Institutionalisation is an ongoing process that occurs in many facets of organisational life and paves the way for enabling persistent norms, such as formalisation in public organisations (Boddy-Evans 2020; Lawrence & Shadnam 2008:2289). Institutionalisation provides a moral compass for acceptable thoughts and actions that strengthen institutions over time (Walker 2020; Cooper, Ezzamel & Willmott 2008:676). However, though uncommon, institutions can also weaken, change, transform and re-emerge as new institutions when organisations undergo the processes of deinstitutionalisation and reinstitutionalisation (Gottschalk & Hamerton 2024: 61;. Dacin & Dacin 2008:349). Deinstitutionalisation and reinstitutionalisation are interrelated as the disappearance of old practices usually heralds the beginning of new cultural, social, and organisational conventions (Dacin & Dacin 2008:348).

Deinstitutionalisation occurs when institutional practices diminish due to pressures from varying levels of organisational functioning (Scott 2008:196). However, very often old practices re-emerge as “new” patterns of behaviour in what is known as reinstitutionalisation (Dacin & Dacin 2008:349). Political, social, economic, and functional pressures promote deinstitutionalisation and reinstitutionalisation processes (Scott 2008:196). These pressures encourage change, which in turn inspires the adoption of “new” institutional policies and practices, heralding reinstitutionalisation (Walker 2020; Dacin, Goodstein, & Scott 2002:46). Insight into the institutionalisation, deinstitutionalisation and reinstitutionalisation processes provides information about recurrent aspects of bureaucratic structuring in public organisations.

1.9.1.2 Institutional logics

“Institutional logics” is an abstract umbrella term in NIT literature that explains the passage of institutional conventions, such as bureaucratic structuration and impersonal management for example, into the organisation (Gümüsay, Claus & Amis 2020:3; Willmott 2011:68; Friedland & Alford 1991:250). Building on Friedland and Alford’s (1991) work, Thornton and Ocasio

(2008:101) define the said term as “the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize [sic] time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality.” Within the framework of this study, the institutional logics concept thus alludes to the ritualised norms that infiltrate organisations from the wider environment and shape individual, group, and organisational behaviours (Gümüsay et al. 2020:5; Ocasio, Loewenstein & Nigam 2015:44; Little 2014; Consiglio, Moschera, Berni & Cicellin 2010:3; Thornton, Jones & Kury 2005:128). This theoretical concept can therefore provide insight into the interrelations between the organisational field (i.e., public organisations) and the enacted behaviours of actors within the institutional context (public employees), as actors disseminate institutional logics to the organisation via institutional messages.

1.9.1.3 Institutional messages

Communication sustains institutions via both direct and indirect institutional messages (Fredriksson 2014:324). Institutional messages, in the form of texts, documents, regulations, norms, and conventions, are the instruments through which institutional values and conventions flow into organisations (David, Tolbert & Boghossian 2020; Barley 2011:201; Lammers 2011:156; Lammers & Barbour 2006:365). Examples of institutional messages include, inter alia, policy documents, organisational practices and other communicative messages in various formats and mediums.

1.9.2 Distinction between public (government)-and private (corporate) organisations

Organisations tend to exhibit features of both private and public entities, but incline towards one or the other (Biswas 2020; Allison 2017:386; Anyonge et al. 2013:13; Kettl & Fesler 2005:9; Rainey & Bozeman 2000:449). The distinction between private and public organisations, hence, depends on the general characteristics that manifest within each sector (Veloso, Tzafrir & Enosh 2015:21; Chen & Rainey 2014:953; Anyonge et al. 2013:14; Meier & O'Toole 2011:i284; Perry & Rainey 1988:182; Gortner 1986:8). The more broadly defined differences between the public and private sector, as discussed below, are of relevance to this study.

Despite variations in the term “public”, the most common usage of the term in relation to organisations employed for this research emphasises government status (Biswas 2020; Hult 2012:195). Therefore, a relevant distinction provided by Anyonge et al. (2013:13) is as follows: “the public sector claims to exercise authority on behalf of the citizens within a demarcated jurisdiction, and the private sector makes decisions and acts on behalf of individual or group

interests, and has limited responsibility for society as a whole." The important point that can be grasped from this distinction is that both private and public organisations contend with and are accountable to different institutional frameworks (Walker 2020; Allison 2017:387; Hvidman & Anderson 2014:37). As such, the primary concern of private organisations is its profitability, while the public organisation largely concerns itself with legislation and public scrutiny (Boddy-Evans 2020; Anyonge et al. 2013:15; Perry & Rainey 1988:186; Murray 1975:365). In other words, public organisations are government-endorsed enterprises that provide basic services to citizens within government-allocated jurisdictions and are therefore accountable to the public, which explains why organisations in this sector are also commonly referred to as government organisations.

As a result of stringent government oversight, the structure, operations, and activities of public organisations are highly regulated, which may, as is argued in this research, also affect internal communication strategies and functioning (Allison 2017:399; Christensen, Laegreid, Roness & Rovik 2007:5; Gortner et al. 1987:3). In summary, as put forth in this study, public organisations are different from their private counterparts in many respects, particularly due to the differences in their institutional frameworks (Biswas 2020; Dickson, Hargie & Wilson 2008:134; Buelens & Van den Broeck 2007:68; Rainey & Bozeman 2000:453; Murray 1975:365). The most important differences are evident in structural, administrative, and functional design, where public organisations manifest more formalisation and impersonal administration due to institutional pressures and issues of compliance with legislated policy frameworks in comparison to their counterparts in the private sector.

1.9.2.1 Local Government Organisations

Local government organisations are public organisations that provide governance, services, and regulation at a community level. They are the lowest level of government that ensures the implementation of policies, infrastructure development, and social welfare programs tailored to the needs of residents (McCabe 2023; CoGTA 2021a). Local government organisations consist of municipalities, which must be established throughout the country. They usually carry out the administrative function of governance and service delivery. The reference to local government organisations in this thesis refers to municipalities in the South African context.

1.9.2.2 Organisational field

The organisational field refers to organisations at the same level of functioning, such as local government organisations, which is the focus of this study. The concept originates from neo-institutional theory (NIT) and describes organisations that function in a similar institutional

context. Field-level governance systems yield greater authority than national systems in certain instances, as policy changes are instituted at the meso level to guide the activities of sectoral entities and reduce significant differentiation between entities at the inter-organisational level (Woodhouse 2024; Scott 2008:185; Thoenig 2003:130; Dacin et al. 2002:51). Thus, organisations within a field need to structure their strategies and processes very closely in line with the expected norm. This would explain why there is minimal structural differentiation in local government organisations within a specified national jurisdiction such as South Africa.

1.9.3 Organisational Communication

Organisational communication performs a strategic role in an organisation and, within the framework of this research, can be defined as the embodiment of the organisation's messages to its internal and external stakeholders, with the intent of creating and preserving favourable relationships with all organisational stakeholders (Nagar 2025; Eliadis 2020; Cornelissen 2014:5; Angelopulo & Thomson 2013:17; Barker 2013:76; Tariszka-Semegine 2012:87; Mazzei 2010:222; Hargie & Tourish 2004:13). However, this study puts forth a broader understanding of organisational communication that considers information that comes into the organisation from the environment.

Before presenting a comprehensive definition of organisational communication, it is important to distinguish between communication and organisation first. Despite an agreement on some core elements of the terms "organisation" and "communication", scholars define organisational communication in various ways (Nagar 2025; Nicotera 2020:28; Yaxley & Ruck 2015:7; Men 2014:265; Angelopulo & Thomson 2013:17; Tariszka-Semegine 2012:88; Welch & Jackson 2007:183; Miller 2006:1; Griffin 2003:259). Therefore, it is important to understand the term *communication* first before defining organisational communication within the context of this study.

Communication refers to "the fundamental process of organising" that is required to develop and maintain organisational structure and to coordinate and implement various organisational activities (Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers 2003:156). Communication fulfils three basic functions within an organisation, the explanation of which is important in understanding the complex internal communication processes of local government organisations germane to this study (Nagar 2025; Nicotera 2020:35; Eliadis 2020; Angelopulo & Thomson 2013:5; Hargie & Tourish 2004:5; Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers 2003:158). As explained hereunder, there has to be a strategic interplay between these three functions of communication to ensure optimised internal communication processes.

- **Production**

This communication function deals with the functional aspects of communication, such as message production and information dissemination. Information about organisational policies, work content, as well as other task-related and organisational information, would generally fall into this category of communication functions.

- **Maintenance**

Maintenance refers to social communication functions and stimulates the development and maintenance of relationships. Superior-subordinate relationships, feedback mechanisms, language, and rhetoric are important communication aspects related to maintaining intra-organisational relationships.

- **Innovation**

Information and communication activities, such as messages related to organisational change, innovation, and advancement, are necessary in the conception and implementation of strategic decision-making strategies to ensure organisational health. This would form the innovation aspect of the communication function.

Communication approached in this way would therefore entail a combination of information dissemination, relationship-building, and the dynamic interchange of ideas to ensure optimal organisational functioning as the strategic interplay of these functions would encourage communication to flow vertically and horizontally with a positive influence on organisational climate (Eliadis 2020; Favero, Meier & O'Toole 2014:5; Disher 2013:8; Van der Walt 2013:126; David 2011:72; Welch & Jackson 2007:178; Hargie & Tourish 2004:6). Evidently, organisations exist due to communication, just as communication occurs due to organisations, which indicates an interdependent relationship between the organisation and communication (Nicotera 2020:35; Putnam, Nicotera & McPhee 2009:2; Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers 2003:3).

Therefore, for the purpose of this study, Miller (2006:1) provides an all-encompassing definition that states, “The study of organizational communication involves understanding how the context of the organization influences communication processes and how the symbolic nature of communication differentiates it from other forms of organizational behaviour, [and] involves the fascinating intersection between the organizational context and the communication process” [all sic].

The important concepts within this definition are *organisational context* and *communication processes*. With regard to the framework of this study, the notion of the organisational context

implies the important influence of the environment within which the local government organisation (and by implication, public organisations in general) functions on its internal communication processes, policies, and strategies.

1.9.3.1 Internal Organisational Communication

Internal organisational communication, often perceived as a synonym for intra-organisational communication, is also referred to as internal communication and employee communications (Nicotera 2020:35; Verčič, Verčič & Sriramesh 2012:225). Internal communication is one aspect of organisational communication and refers to the communication processes that take place within an organisation that ensure optimum functionality and performance of the organisation and the employee alike (Mishra, Boynton & Mishra 2014:185; Gbadamosi 2003:278). Internal communication is the central process through which employees share information, create relationships, and make meaning, and is a key determinant of employee motivation and engagement, job satisfaction, job performance and ultimately overall organisational health (Nicotera 2020:37; Yaxley & Ruck 2015:8; Mishra et al. 2014:184; Verčič et al. 2012:225; David 2011:74; Gillis 2011:200; Whitworth 2011:198).

Employees constitute an important component of the organisational system; therefore, effective internal organisational communication is the backbone of an optimally functioning organisation and needs to be structured in a way that provides the best possible flow and content of communication between its respective members (Welch 2015:25; Men 2014:267; David 2011:75; Welch & Jackson 2007:183; Miller 2006:2; Bauer 2004:14; Rhee 2004:4). Effective internal organisational communication serves to promote organisational identification as it affords employees the perception of belonging to the organisation and allows them to define themselves in terms of the organisation's core values, mission, goals, and principles (Eliadis 2020; Welch 2015:27; Abugre 2014:656; Jung 2013:960; Su, Baird & Blair 2013:243; Yoon & Park 2011:558). With the emphasis on employee communication satisfaction in this study, all theoretical and empirical focus gravitates towards internal organisational communication.

1.9.3.2 The Communicative Constitution of Organisations (CCO)

Aligned with the multilevel analysis suggested for this study, the communicative constitution of communication (CCO) perspective explains how communication processes constitute public organisations, and supports the central argument put forward in this thesis stating that the internal communication practices of local government organisations are influenced by institutional processes (McPhee, Myers & Iverson 2025:41; Nicotera 2020:10; Schoeneborn, Blaschke, Cooren, McPhee, Seidl & Taylor 2014:287; Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott 2008:308). While it can

be argued that organisations generate communication processes, CCO also acknowledges that "organizations [sic] are communicatively constituted" (Nicotera 2020:11; Brummans, Cooren, Robichaud & Taylor 2014:174; McPhee & Zaug 2009:9; Putnam et al. 2009:1; Lederman & Gibson 2000:42).

The main presumption of this approach, according to the purposes of this study, is that messages from the institutional environment play a role in constituting public organisations as institutional frameworks, through regulation and accountability, and provide the impetus to both shape and regulate employees' behaviours and internal communication processes and applications.

1.9.3.3 Organisational culture

Simply stated, organisational culture is the personality of the organisation that "is socially created through the communicative performances of organizational [sic] members" (Miller 2015:78). In accordance with the focus of this study, and in line with the preceding description of the communicative constitution of organisations, Baba, Blomberg, LaBond and Adams (2013:93) describe organisational culture "as configurations or assemblages of cultural-cognitive frameworks, norms, and regulations that reflect institutional characteristics when members share the mission, vision, and assumptions about the world and how to behave therein." In other words, Baba et al. (2013) assert that the public organisation's culture is a carrier of institutional values, which is in line with Scott and Meyer's (1994:19) view of the influence of institutional forces on constituting an organisation's culture or value system.

An understanding of culture and its related structuring influences is thus indicative of the internal communication environment of local government organisations (Indeed 2025; Nicotera 2020:10; McAleese 2016:15; Alvesson 2013:5; Barker 2013:86; Schein 2010:14; Berkley & Rouse 2009:82; Christensen et al. 2007:38; Verwey & du Plooy-Cilliers 2003:135; Franks 1989:357). Therefore, by implication, understanding organisational culture involves an analysis of the internal communication environment, such as channels of communication, working relationships, normative organisational behaviours, and other related communicative interchanges that have been influenced by institutional frameworks.

1.9.3.4 Formal and informal communication

Internal communication includes both formal and informal communication (Nagar 2025; Dahlman & Heide 2020:63; Ramirez 2012:10; Berkley & Rouse 2009:208). Formal communication flows through the hierarchy of an organisation, guided by fixed guidelines and channels and is predominantly enforced by the use of written texts (Sharma 2015:15; Ramirez 2012:10).

"Organisational size" and "public character" are the two factors that promote the use of formal communication (Holzer & Schwester 2020:49; Berkley & Rouse 2009:208). Firstly, as organisations expand, they tend to make increasing use of formal communication and correspondingly diminishing use of informal communication (Berkley & Rouse 2009:208).

"Public character" is the other factor, as public organisations tend to rely more heavily on formal communication than their peers in the private sector because formal communication advocates accountability (Sharma 2015:15; Berkley & Rouse 2009:207). Dhoot (2020) and Berkley and Rouse (2009:207) add, by facilitating accountability formal communication aims to curtail unpredictability, variability, preferential treatment, and inequity.

Informal communication, on the other hand, is built on social relationships between employees within the organisational environment, has no fixed flow of communication, and cannot be restrained due to the continuous interactions between employees (Eads 2025; Nagar 2025; Holzer & Schwester 2020:60; Berkley & Rouse 2009:208). The "grapevine" is another term used for informal communication and might be observed occurring in face-to-face conversations, electronic mail, text, and social media messages, as well as phone calls between socialising employees (Sharma 2015:15; Ramirez 2012:10). Informal communication is an important factor in determining employees' perceptions of the organisation.

1.9.3.5 Job satisfaction and productivity

The relationship between internal communication and job satisfaction and productivity that substantiates the significance of intra-organisational communication satisfaction is often cited and researched in the literature (*see* Erben et al. 2019; Kucharska & Bedford 2019; Smith et al. 2018; Ikolo 2018; Lambert et al. 2017; Verčič & Vokić 2017; Vermeier et al. 2017; Rodrigues & Carlos 2010; Pincus 1986). Job satisfaction is generally examined from the employee's perspective and is often correlated with workplace productivity (Albright 2020; Barnett 2020; Sharma 2015:44; Ehlers 2003:3). While job satisfaction describes an employee's affective response to his/her work, productivity in the workplace refers to excellence in individual and collective performance that not only benefits the organisation but also improves the delivery of services to citizens in the local government context (Barnett 2020; Root 2017; Abugre 2014:658; Berkley & Rouse 2009:282). Internal communication is thus an important factor in determining job satisfaction, which ultimately leads to improved job performance and overall productivity in organisations.

1.9.4 Public administration

Public administration is an academic and a practical field concerned with the execution of government policy within national, provincial, and local spheres, with local government being at the grassroots level of service delivery (Boddy-Evans 2020; Peters & Pierre 2012:1; Berkley & Rouse 2009:4; Kettl & Fesler 2009:9). The execution of government policy is, in reality, a complex task that necessitates the administration (management, organisation, and coordination) of various operations traditionally accomplished through bureaucratic structures and hierarchical organisation that categorise tasks by rank and function (Boddy-Evans 2020; Shafritz & Hyde 2017:69; Lynn 2012:19; Peters & Pierre 2012:2; Farazmand 2009:2; Jaffee 2008:89; Sutherland & Canwell 1997:193; Gortner 1986:100).

1.9.4.1 The Politics-Administration Dichotomy

The politics-administration (P-A) dichotomy is a foundational concept in public administration that mandates a strict functional separation between the political sphere (elected officials focused on policymaking and values) and the administrative sphere (civil servants focused on policy execution, technical management, and efficiency). The ideal purpose of this dichotomy is to ensure that the administration remains professional, neutral, and impartial, thereby safeguarding public service delivery from political self-interest.

The notion of the structural separation of the administrative and political functions of government institutions, coupled with the persistence of the bureaucratic structure of public organisations, explains the frequent association of the term “administrative bureaucracy” or “public administration” with public organisations (Petridou 2020:4; Trondal & Veggeland 2014:57; Frederickson et al. 2012:76; Rainey 1992:111). Insight into how this complex administrative process influences internal communication processes within local government organisations forms an important component of this study.

1.9.4.2 The Political-Administrative (P-A) disruption

The Political-Administrative (P-A) disruption is defined as an institutional misalignment that occurs when political interference exerts a coercive influence that materially diverges from the legal and functional separation mandated by the P-A dichotomy. This misalignment introduces coercive institutional pressure into the administrative domain, compromising administrative management and control mechanisms within the public organisation, and the bearing this has on administration and internal communication within the public organisation.

This study focuses specifically on the acute P-A disruption that followed the 2016 local government elections at the eThekwini Municipality as its central empirical event. While acknowledging the practical difficulty of achieving perfect separation, the legal and institutional enforcement of the P-A dichotomy, particularly in South African local government, remains the cornerstone of good governance; therefore, the P-A disruption is conceptually defined as the disruption of this institutional principle by political forces introducing coercive pressure into the administrative core.

1.9.4.2 Public employees and politicians

In line with the structural separation of the administration and political aspects of public organisations discussed in the section above, there is a separation between the roles of public employees and politicians (Boddy-Evans 2020; Frederickson et al. 2012:19; Kettl & Fesler 2009:80). Public employees are often referred to as public servants who work for the administrative aspect of the public organisation, are involved in the administration of government mandates, and are hired via standard employment practices. Politicians, on the other hand, are the elected officials involved in the policy-making aspect of public organisations and are chosen via a voting process in the legislature.

1.9.4.3 Efficiency and effectiveness

Organisations need to be both "efficient" and "effective" to thrive. "Efficiency" involves doing things well through the input of various resources, such as inter alia, a workforce, time, and finances, to achieve clearly defined organisational outputs. On the other hand, "effectiveness" involves doing the **right** things well and entails the strategic implementation of resources for optimised performance (Bansal 2020; Walker & Andrews 2015:103; Berkley & Rouse 2009:283).

Hence, there is an ongoing debate in public administration discourse concerning effective and efficient administration, which is a conundrum of sorts in public organisations. In other words, due to various reasons, as discussed in this thesis, public organisations struggle to find the right balance between effective and efficient communication and administration in to provide optimum services to their constituents.

1.9.4.4 Accountability

Public bureaucracies are accountable to the governance systems of their specific countries and jurisdictions, hence rendering *accountability* a central concern of both the study and the practice of public administration (Ozga 2020:19; Murphy 2019; Thomas 2012:673; Painter & Peters

2010:8). Accountability in public organisations embodies both “upward” accountability to ministers and parliament, and “downward” and ‘horizontal’ accountability to other peer organisations (Gregory 2012:687). While controversy surrounds the concept of accountability, for the purposes of this study, accountability involves an expectation of the fulfilment of specified tasks and responsibilities, ideally based on certain agreed-upon criteria determined through regulative structures.

1.9.4.5 Red tape

Red tape refers to excessive or oppressively complex bureaucracy, denoting cumbersome administrative rules and regulative requirements that entail a compliance burden for the organisation and create delays in carrying out tasks efficiently and effectively (Kaufmann, Borry & DeHart-Davis 2019:237; Lotter 2011:11). Hence, it can be argued that red tape refers to rigid and inflexible lines of command and communication that lose their usefulness and reliability as information channels due to “excessive” and cumbersome bureaucratic administration.

1.9.4.6 Actors

Actors could be individuals or collectives who assist in infusing institutional values by disseminating institutional messages within organisations (Hwang & Colyvas 2020:572; Hardy 2011:192; Hwang & Colyvas 2011:63; Suddaby 2010:16; Lammers & Barbour 2006:363; Tolbert & Zucker 1996:181). Although actors have the innate capacity to enact change and disrupt institutions, they are generally not value-free (Suddaby 2010:16; Lammers & Barbour 2006:363; Tolbert & Zucker 1996:181). Therefore, actors are commonly identified as supra-individuals within supra-organisations who play an active role in perpetuating the power and endurance of institutions within organisations as they persist with enacting institutionalised beliefs and practices across space and time (David et al. 2020; Berthod 2018; Hardy 2011:192). In line with the scope of this study, the focus will be on public employees as actors who play an active role in perpetuating the power and endurance of institutions, whether intentionally or inadvertently, within local government organisations.

1.9.4.7 Agents

As alluded to earlier, although public employees are generally considered supra-individuals who perpetuate the power of institutions in public organisations, they are not always inert conduits of institutional values (Patriotta 2020:868; Grandien & Johansson 2012:215; Hwang & Colyvas 2011:63). Rather, they have the capacity to consciously comprehend institutional messages and act in accordance with these conscious cognitive frames to either fortify or crumble institutions,

given to what extent they practice their agency in the organisational context (Hwang & Colyvas 2020:572; Clegg 2010:9). Public employees, at varying organisational levels, can therefore, also be agents of change who have the power to innovate and challenge rigid institutional conventions and create dissension against enduring practices in order to enact institutional change (Patriotta 2020:868; Lawrence, Suddaby & Leca 2011:55; Clegg 2010:10). Agents have the power to innovate and challenge rigid institutional conventions that create barriers to effective internal communication in bureaucratic organisations, which would entail strategic decision-making capabilities (Thoenig 2012:188; Lawrence et al. 2011:55; DiMaggio & Powell 1991:4). However, although public employees at all levels have the capacity to enact change, decision-makers within public organisations, such as managers, are in a more significant position to change or instil selective institutional conventions within these organisations, due to their position of authority. Agency in the local government context is, however, the exception rather than the norm.

1.10 SUMMARY AND LAYOUT OF OVERALL CHAPTERS

This chapter served as the introduction to this thesis and delineated and demarcated the study. This was firstly done by discussing the background and the context of the unique milieu of the local government sector in South Africa, from which the purpose of the study became clear. Subsequently, the research aims and approach were discussed in depth, outlining how the research problem is approached from a contextual, theoretical and conceptual, and epistemological and ontological stance before delving into the blueprint of the methodological approach applied in this research. The explanation of relevant terminology as it pertains to this study is the last section of this chapter. The remaining chapters of this thesis are outlined below:

- **Chapter 2** of this thesis, in line with the purpose and contextualisation discussed above, orientates and positions this study within the regulative context of the local government sector of South Africa, firstly through a thorough general discussion of this sector, and then of the *eThekwini Municipality* in particular during the critical juncture of the post-2016 municipal elections, specifically.

- **Chapter 3** reviews the extant literature for this study, beginning with NIT, the meta-theoretical foundation of the research and discusses relevant theory to support the claim that the institutional context of public organisations cannot be divorced from its internal communication imperatives. The next section of this chapter elaborates on the bureaucratic structuring of public sector organisations as a result of pressures from the institutional environment, by discussing relevant and related aspects of public administration theory.

These theories discuss the structure of public organisations and the administration and management thereof that play a role in constituting the organisational culture that influences how public organisations approach, manage and practice internal communication.

The final segment of this chapter focuses on the communicative constitution of organisations (CCO), underpinning the role of communication in constituting public organisations, before concluding with a discussion of communication satisfaction literature. This chapter constitutes the theoretical underpinning of the thesis and is used pragmatically for the empirical part of the study.

- **Chapter 4** presents the discussion of the research approach, detailing the research paradigm, philosophy, and methodology used for the empirical part of the study. This chapter also elaborates on ethics, reliability, and validity, as well as the limitations of this study.

- **Chapter 5** presents and discusses the findings and results of the data collected from the empirical study.

- **Chapter 6** is the final chapter of this thesis that provides the overall conclusions after interpreting the findings and results, answering each of the research questions and addressing the main research problem

Figure 1.1 below graphically represents the chapter demarcation of the overall thesis.

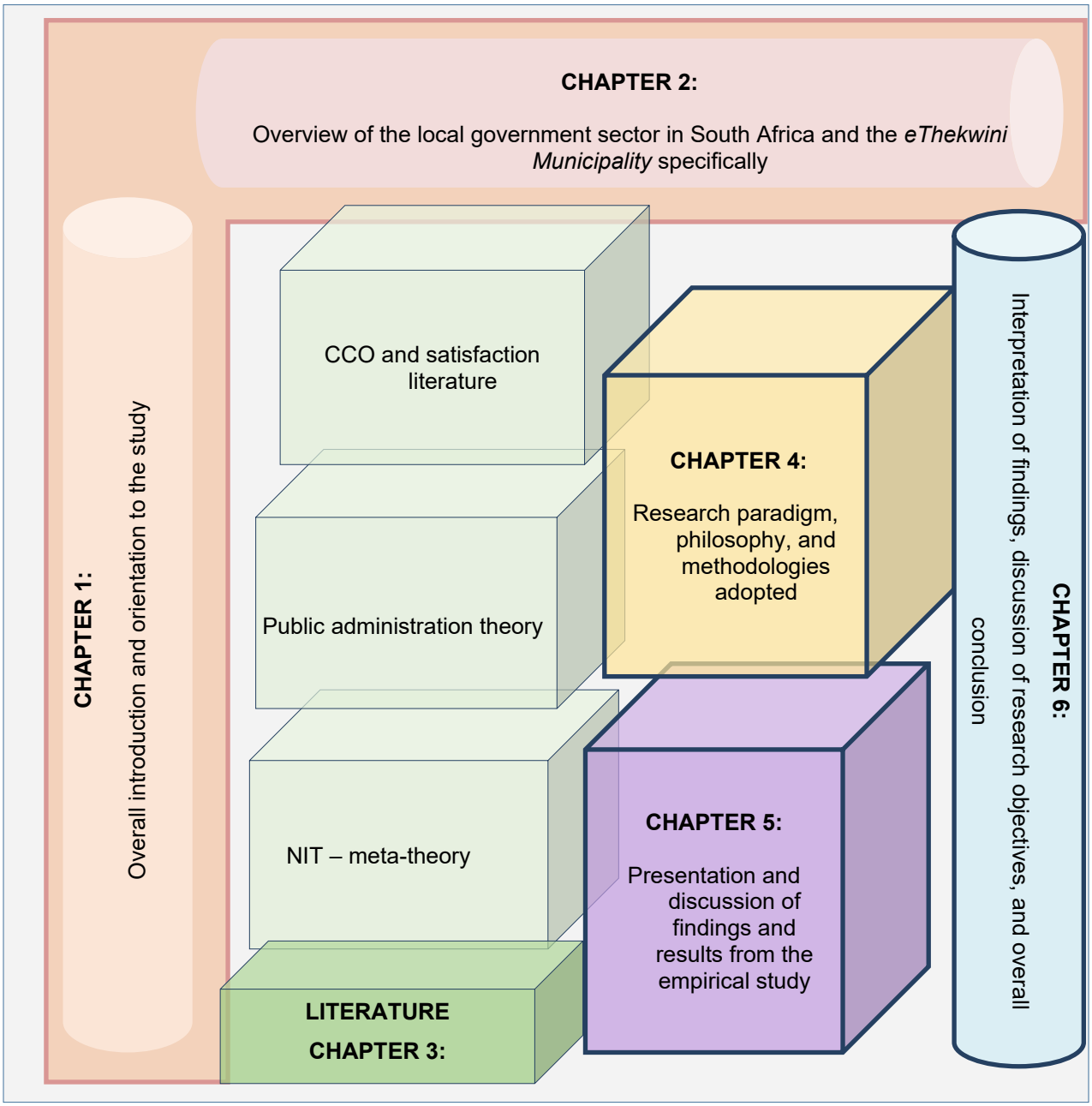


Figure 1.1: Schematic representation of overall chapter distribution within the thesis

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM AND THE ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In contextualising the study in the first chapter, it was argued that improving service delivery in South Africa is one of the foremost objectives of national government. This would require improved organisational performance at local government level, which is at the forefront of service delivery. The pivotal value of effective internal communication in public organisations was accentuated, as it was argued that apart from the overall performance goals outlined for municipalities, adopting effective communication practices needed to be emphasised to improve the overall working environment within these entities. Thus, whilst the first chapter provided the overall contextualisation and introduction to the study, this chapter presents the background and institutional backdrop of public sector organisations in the South African context.

Government provides the overall legislative framework that governs the rights and responsibilities of citizens. It also oversees the provision and administration of services and infrastructure that should ideally improve the lives of all its inhabitants. South Africa is a constitutional democracy built on a three-tier system of governance comprising national, provincial, and local government structures as well as an independent judiciary. An autonomous judiciary circumvents government interference in the courts to protect citizens' rights.

Seeing that the judiciary is not formally part of the policymaking or implementation apparatus of government, it will not be discussed in this thesis as it falls beyond the scope of this research. Therefore, all discussions related to the institutional backdrop of local government organisations in South Africa will gravitate towards the three-tier governance structure and the bearing this regulative framework has on the communication systems within local government organisations.

The discussions in this chapter, therefore, begin with a general overview of the environment of public sector organisations in terms of the macro, meso, and micro settings as approached in this study. This is done so as to orient the discussion within the multilevel and multidisciplinary approach proposed at the outset. The chapter then draws attention to the governance system in South Africa as the institutional environment within which public organisations function.

The discussions filter down to the legislative framework guiding local government organisations and thenceforth shed light on the structure and organisation of the *eThekwini Municipality* with particular focus on their internal communication strategies and practices. This contextualisation

is essential for understanding the specific institutional conditions and administrative environment that existed during the period of acute Political-Administrative (P-A) disruption between March 2017 and September 2017, which is the central empirical focus of this research. This done, this chapter answers research questions 1.2 and 3.2, namely:

Macro-level: Institutional Context

Sub-Problem 1

RQ 1.2: Within what regulative environment do local government organisations in South Africa and the *eThekwini Municipality* specifically function?

Micro-level: Internal Communication and Satisfaction

Sub-Problem 3

RQ 3.2: How was internal communication managed at eThekwini Municipality during the post-2016 municipal elections disruption (March–September 2017)?

2.2 THE ENVIRONMENT OF PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANISATIONS

For this study, the organisational landscape for public organisations can be described in terms of three broadly defined, yet interdependent, categories, namely, the macro, meso, and micro levels (Butler, Johnson, Chiweza, Aung, Quinley, Rogers & Bedford 2020; Scott 2008:85; Lammers & Barbour 2006:154; Frumkin & Galaskiewicz 2004:295; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:148). “Despite the analytical distinctions of levels of analysis, the boundaries within and among organizations, institutions, and environments are more permeable” (Hult 2012:194). This assertion infers that the different levels of organisational functioning are not necessarily linear, nor mutually exclusive even though the different tiers of the organisational environment and their dynamic interactions can be signified within the three broad tiers of classification (Butler et al. 2020; Roberts 2020:632; Vlados & Chatzinikolaou 2020:6; Scott 2008:85; Christensen et al. 2007:31). It is thus argued, within the framework of this study that assessing the internal communication strategies and practices of public sector entities without paying attention to their complex environmental pressures would not present a holistic view of their functioning, as environmental factors play a pertinent role in the design and management of public organisations and their internal processes.

Therefore, this study puts forth a multilevel approach that requires an exploration of all three interrelated levels of the organisational landscape, as discussed in this section, to study the internal communication satisfaction within public organisations. Exploring these three levels of the organisational environment within a single study would provide a more complete picture of

how institutional values infiltrate individual organisations in the public sector and the resultant influence of institutional processes on constituting the dominant organisational culture and consequently, the internal communication satisfaction of the entity under investigation. Figure 2.1 below depicts these three interdependent levels of public sector organisational functioning, contextualised within the South African setting as applicable to this study.

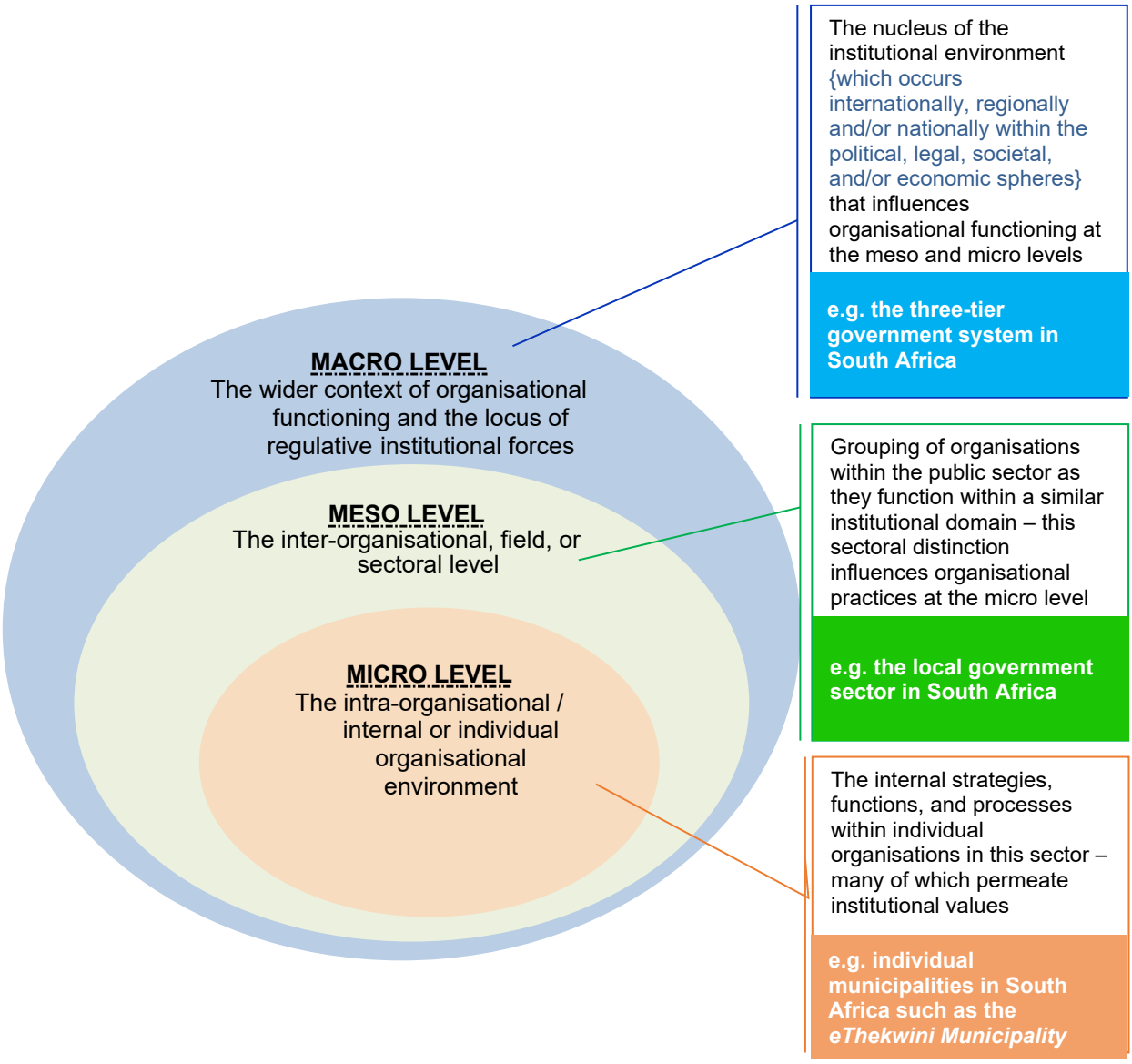


Figure 2.1: The three interdependent tiers of public sector organisational functioning, contextualised within the South African setting as applicable to this study

Source: Developed by Ashiya Osman (2026), based on a synthesis of relevant literature and policy sources.

The processes external to the organisation, such as the wider societal, political, legal, and economic environments, at the national, regional, and/or international level that influence the creation and maintenance of public sector organisations indicate the **macro** level or the broader **institutional setting** (Butler et al. 2020; Roberts 2020:632; Lammers & Garcia 2014:199; Scott & Meyer 1994:37; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:147). Hence, the jurisdiction of the macro level of analysis depends on the central concern of the study, which for this study is the institutional environment relevant to local government organisations in South Africa. The three-tier government system, discussed in detail in sub-section 2.2.1 below, forms the institutional core of local government in South Africa. As such, the regulative structures in terms of legal and political climates provide the central institutional forces that public sector organisations contend with and abide by and, thus, form the focus of this research (Roberts 2020:632; Scott & Meyer 1994:64). (Frederickson et al. 2012:15; Thoenig 2012:188). In this respect, an analysis of how local government organisations implement government-mandated regulations pertaining to organisations in this sector and the bearing this has on their internal communication policies, strategies, and actions constitutes an important consideration.

Where the macro level refers to the institutional environment, the **meso** level refers to the **organisational field**, **sectoral** or **inter-organisational** space, and elucidates the distinguishing features of the organisations that fall within the public sector, and specifically in the local government sector of South Africa for this study (Roberts 2020:632; Scott 2008:86; Wooten & Hoffman 2008:134; Christensen et al. 2007:7; Frumkin & Galaskiewicz 2004:285; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:148). These organisations are “clustered” into an organisational field as they contend with similar regulative pressures, officials to whom they are accountable, policies and processes implemented, and services rendered (Allison 2017:458; Chaney & Slimane 2014:97; Grandien & Johansson 2012:214; Wooten & Hoffman 2008:138; Lammers & Barbour 2006:360; Thoenig 2003:130; Scott & Meyer 1994:71; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:150). Organisations in this sector, therefore, construct their own identity, cultural norms, and meaning systems and resultantly tend to resemble each other structurally and functionally in line with institutional archetypes, which is one of the arguments central to the discussion of internal communication within local government organisations in this study (Roberts 2020:632; Frumkin & Galaskiewicz 2004:285; Scott & Meyer 1994:71; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:150).

While the meso level of organisational functioning refers to the inter-organisational or field level of analysis, the micro-tier signifies the internal workings within individual public organisations, or specific municipalities in South Africa, such as the *eThekwini Municipality*, as applicable to this study (Francovich 2018; Grandien & Johansson 2012:215; Lammers & Barbour 2006:356). The micro-level signifies the intra-organisational or the internal environment of the public organisation

and constitutes an exploration of the micro-processes within the individual organisation (Roberts 2020:632; Bitektine & Haack 2015:49; Zucker 1987:455). For this study, the examination of micro-processes involves an exploration of institutional dynamics that manifest within the public organisation, such as the implementation of communication strategies, channels of communication, communicative behaviours, and information dissemination within a municipality. The intent is to highlight the influence of the institutional environment on internal communication processes and practices in local government organisations and their ultimate bearing on employees' communication satisfaction.

Taking this into consideration, the section below presents a general overview of the South African government system as the institutional backdrop of local government organisations in South Africa and the influence this has on their structure and functioning, as the institutional framework provides municipalities with a set of criteria to structure and manage their administrative functions. Thus, the deliberations on the three-tier governance structure in South Africa provide a description of the institutional framework of local government organisations in this context. As the institutional backdrop of public organisations is largely regulated by a legislative framework, various policies that have a bearing on the structuration of local government organisations are subsequently discussed. Although various policies and legislations regulate the activities of local government organisations, only the policies that have a direct bearing on the structuration and administration of local government organisations, which influence communication systems, are discussed as they pertain to this study.

As such, the Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) and the Local Government White Paper (1998) provide the basis of current policy and legislative requirements affecting local governance in South Africa. The Local Government Municipal Demarcation Act (Act 27 of 1998), the Local Government Municipal Structures (Act 117 of 1998), and the Local Government Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000) stem from the Constitution and the Local Government White Paper and outline the basic political decision-making systems that define principles for structuring public administrations. These discussions then zoom in on the structuration of the *eThekwini Municipality* specifically as aligned with the overall institutional framework, bringing to the fore the intra-organisational policies that structure communication therein.

2.2.1 Overview of the three-tiered system of government in South Africa

As the statutory anchor of South African governance, the Constitution, established in 1996 after the fall of apartheid, outlines the roles and functions of the three-tiered government structure (South Africa 1996). The South African government is organised into the national, provincial, and local spheres, which are functionally distinct but structured to be interdependent and interrelated. Each sphere exercises entrenched legislative and executive authority over defined mandates, subject to specific intergovernmental oversight and intervention protocols to maintain the functional viability of local governance (South Africa 1996). The implication is that the national sphere exercises the final adjudicatory authority in cases of systemic deadlock, to restore administrative coherence and ensure legislative precedence. Each sphere of government is further divided into three components: the legislature, the executive committee, and the administration, functionally dividing the political and administrative facets of governance (South Africa 1996). Table 2.1 below provides a snapshot of the structure of the three-tier government system in South Africa and illustrates the placement and function of local government in this structure.

Table 2.1: The structure of the three-tier system of government in South Africa

Source: Compiled by Ashiya Osman (2026), based on information derived from the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) (2025a) publications, and Government of South Africa (2026).

			A	B	C
	SPHERE		ELECTED MEMBERS [LEGISLATURE] Represent the public, approve policies and laws, and monitor the work of the executive and departments	EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE [CABINET] Coordinate the making of policies and laws, and oversee implementation by the government departments	DEPARTMENTS AND CIVIL SERVANTS [ADMINISTRATION] Responsible for doing the work of government and is accountable to the executive committee.
1	NATIONAL	National government is responsible for providing an overall legislative framework for local government within the general legal framework set out in the Constitution	**Parliament**	**President and Cabinet**	**Directors and Departments (Ministries)**
2	PROVINCIAL	Provincial government establishes municipalities and is tasked by Section 155 (6) of the Constitution with promoting the development of local government capacity	Provincial Legislature	Premier and Executive Council	Heads of Departments and Staff
3	LOCAL	Local government is the sphere of government closest to the people and is divided into municipalities, as per legislation. Local government is responsible for the delivery of basic services	Council	Mayor and Mayoral Committee	Municipal Manager, Heads of Departments and Staff

2.2.1.1 National government

As the overarching regulatory structure of South Africa, national government enacts laws and policies that steer the provincial and local spheres. This central authority comprises Parliament, Cabinet, and the Ministries. Parliament, as the national legislature, is responsible for the enactment of statutory frameworks and is made up of 2 distinct houses supported by a unified administrative core, namely:

- The National Assembly (the House that voters elect every five years), and
- The National Council of Provinces (NCOP) (ensure the representation of provincial interests at national level that representatives of provincial legislatures elect).

The President, selected by Parliament, provides the strategic leadership for the national sphere. Together with the Cabinet, the President directs the executive mandate and sets the policy mandates, which the administration is tasked to operationalise. Among these responsibilities are safety and security, foreign affairs, defence, and home affairs, as well as instituting policies that guide service delivery in the other two spheres (South Africa 1996). As set out in the Constitution, national government, in collaboration with the provincial sphere of government, is mandated to implement an overall legislative framework for local government. This ensures that local government optimally facilitates the development of citizens, local communities, and the nation. National government is responsible for:

- **Capacity Building:** Setting the regulatory framework to strengthen municipal skills and performance,
- **Institutional Support Structures:** Establishing the intergovernmental support structures and technical resources that provide direct support for municipalities,
- **Demarcation:** Defining the legal criteria for municipal boundaries and jurisdictions, and
- **Functional Balance:** Ensuring powers and functions are appropriately allocated based on each municipality's specific category.

National government also determines the legislation regarding:

- **Provincial Alignment:** Ensuring provincial laws are consistent with national standards and the Constitution,
- **Electoral Systems:** Defining the democratic processes for municipal elections political representation,
- **Fiscal Provisions:** Establishing the legal framework for municipal revenue-raising (taxation and rates), the equitable sharing of national revenue (grants), and the strict standards for financial accountability. and
- **Public Administration:** Establishing the standards for how government functions are managed and executed.

Building the intergovernmental architecture that keeps the three spheres aligned is an important function of national government. This framework establishes the statutory protocols and conflict-resolution mechanisms required to address intergovernmental discord. According to Section 154 (1) of the Constitution, both national and provincial government must provide the structural support municipalities require to improve their functional capacity and self-governing power, as mandated in the legislative framework. This function includes designating the structures, procedures, and mechanisms to facilitate positive intergovernmental relations and conflict-resolution within and between the spheres of government. According to Section 154 (1) of the Constitution, both national and provincial government should support municipalities to enhance their efficiency and self-directing capabilities as espoused in the legislative framework.

This essentially means that local government organisations *have autonomy, with restrictions*. To make this point clearer, according to Section 155 (7) of the Constitution, national and provincial governments have the legislative and executive authority to oversee the effective performance of municipalities and their functions in respect of any task legislatively assigned to local government. Moreover, although provincial government is primarily responsible for intervention in municipal administration, national government may also need to intervene together with provincial government. National intervention may also occur in instances where a provincial government fails to intervene, or in cases that affect national fiscal reserves. This environment explicates the complex regulative environment of local government organisations.

2.2.1.1.1 The National Development Plan (NDP)

The National Development Plan (NDP) is a functional roadmap created under the Constitution. It sets out an implementation framework of strategic targets and required actions that each sector in the country should reach by 2030 (National Planning Commission 2021). Chapter 13 of the NDP focuses on local government outputs by prioritising a professional and skilled workforce. It argues that building long-term institutional capacity requires consistent skills development at every level. To improve organisational performance, the NDP sets two strategic goals: refining organisational design and boosting staff morale (Manuel 2021:408). The NDP also aims to balance the Political-Administrative confluence to reduce political interference in the efficient and effective administration of local government mandates. This intervention promotes intergovernmental cooperation, ensuring all three spheres can effectively implement the national development.

2.2.1.1.2 The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA)

The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA), formerly the Department of Provincial and Local Government, is the national ministry responsible for intergovernmental coordination. It consists of two sub-departments: the Cooperative Governance and the Traditional Affairs. Aligned with the objectives of Chapter 13 of the NDP, CoGTA aims to build a sustainable local government structure. Its mandate, rooted in Chapters 3, 6, 7, and 12 of the Constitution, involves overseeing traditional leadership and ensuring the three spheres work as a unified system.

2.2.1.2 Provincial government

South Africa's nine provincial governments are responsible for social service delivery. Under Section 155 (6) of the Constitution, they must establish municipalities and provide the necessary oversight, coordination, and support. Their mandate includes planning and budgeting for various services, such as:

- **Service Delivery:** Providing health, educational, and social development facilities, alongside public works, and housing,
- **Infrastructure Support:** Dispensing grants to help municipalities secure "bulk infrastructure", such as water, sewerage, and electricity,
- **Fiscal Oversight:** Ensuring fiscal sustainability by auditing municipal accounts and intervening where necessary to prevent collapse, and
- **Strategic Alignment:** Monitoring municipal planning and budgeting (Section 153 of the Constitution) to ensure they remain anchored to community needs.

Provincial government acts as an intergovernmental link, creating platforms for municipalities to participate in strategic decision-making and horizontal collaboration. While municipalities are the primary employers, the province is responsible for a capacity-building framework that aligns with national labour standards, these. These duties underscore the province's vital role in the institutional development of local government.

2.2.1.3 Local government

The sphere closest to the people in a local jurisdiction is local government, also called municipal government. Under Section 151 of the Constitution, municipalities are granted functional autonomy to manage community affairs. Although the national and spheres provide oversight, they are constitutionally prohibited from interfering with a municipality's ability to exercise its powers. The municipal structure consists of two parts: Council and Administration.

1. The **Municipal Council** is the political arm and holds legislative authority. Led by the Mayor, its elected members are responsible for:
    - **Legislative Approval:** Passing policies and by-laws that align with national legislation,
    - **Budget Oversight:** Approving the annual municipal budget, and
    - **Strategic Planning:** Setting service delivery targets for the municipality.

2. The **Municipal Administration** (the focus of this research) is led by the Municipal Manager (MM). This administrative arm manages daily operations and is responsible for delivering basic services to the local community.

The Council elects the Mayor, who is supported by an Executive Committee of councillors. This political leadership oversees the work of the Municipal Manager and his/her departmental heads. Appointed under the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000, the MM is responsible for staffing and implementing Council-approved initiatives. Constitutionally, municipalities must ensure all citizens receive basic services, including housing, water, sanitation, and electricity. Municipalities are, thus, responsible for the delivery of basic services, such as housing, water and sanitation services, electricity, and related services. In addition to basic services, municipalities are legally tasked with specific duties that intersect with provincial mandates. These distributed responsibilities typically include:

- **Functional responsibilities:**
    - **Administration:** Determining municipal structures and internal organisation,
    - **Building Jurisdictional Regulations:** Passing and enforcing building and construction by-laws,
    - **Infrastructure and Transport:** Managing municipal public transport and overseeing local (non-national) airports and harbours.
    - **Economic Development:** Supporting local tourism,
    - the oversight of airports and harbours; and
    - **Public Safety:** Providing firefighting and disaster management services.

- **Financial Mandate (Revenue):**
  Municipalities are allowed, by law, to source income through:
    - **Property rates:** Levying taxes on land and buildings,
    - **Service Tariffs**: Charging for utilities (water, electricity) and amenities (libraries),
    - **Fines:** Collecting revenue from traffic and by-law violations,
    - **Capital Financing:** Securing loans for infrastructure projects (subject to Council approval and MFMA compliance).

National and provincial governments may assign additional duties to a municipality if they believe it has the capacity to handle them. Under the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000, municipalities can enter into agreements to provide services in another municipality's jurisdiction during emergencies or challenges. Furthermore, every municipality is to develop an Integrated Development Plan (IDP), overseen by CoGTA. Aligned with the National Development Plan (NDP), the IDP is the primary roadmap that guides and informs all local decision-making to ensure the municipality remains responsive to community needs. The IDP must clearly outline:

- **Management and Accountability:** The organisational structure, specific roles, and the people responsible for each stage of the plan,
- **Project Timeline:** The exact time-frames for the planning and implementation phases,
- **Public Engagement:** The systems used for public participation and the strategies for building community partnerships, and
- **Monitoring and Evaluation: T**he system used to oversee and track the progress of the IDP's implementation.

Types of Municipalities

There are three different types of municipalities in South Africa, determined according to the Municipal Structures Act 32 of 2000:

i. **Category A: Metropolitan municipalities**

Metropolitan municipalities (Category A) govern South Africa's largest urban and industrial hubs. As of 2020, there are eight such municipalities, each serving over 500 000 voters. The eThekwini Municipality is a Category A metropolitan municipality located in KwaZulu-Natal province.

ii. **Category B: Local municipalities**

Local municipalities (Category B) serve the regions outside of the eight metropolitan hubs. These municipalities manage a mix of rural areas, towns, and smaller cities.

iii. **Category C: District municipalities**

District municipalities (Category C) cover broader regions outside the cities and are governed by a District Council. This council typically consists of representatives from the 4-6 local municipalities within its borders. Certain district municipalities additionally service nature reserves and extremely sparsely populated areas to form district management areas. While Metros handle all functions independently, Local and District municipalities divide responsibilities, where the District Council often oversees the regional planning and bulk service delivery, especially in rural areas.

2.2.2 Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) and Cooperative Governance

While the preceding section defines the distinct categories and functional boundaries of municipalities, these entities do not operate in isolation. They are embedded within a broader framework of Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) and Cooperative Governance. This framework ensures that the autonomous powers of local government are aligned with national and provincial objectives through structured coordination and shared accountability.

Intergovernmental relations are the constitutionally mandated coordination links between the national, provincial, and local spheres. While the Constitution defines these three spheres as autonomous, they are interdependent. Basically, this means that they have autonomy, with limitations dictated by the requirement for cooperative governance to ensure seamless service delivery.

Institutional Framework: The Legislative Foundation

The White Paper on Local Government (1998), which establishes the mandate for all three spheres to align their planning and resources towards “developmental local government”, the Organised Local Government Act (1997), which provides the mechanism for collective representation in national policy, and the Municipal Systems Act (2000), which sets the basic rules for how municipalities must operate and cooperate with the national and provincial spheres, anchor the institutional framework for intergovernmental relations.

- **The White Paper on Local Government (1998):** This is the primary policy document that established the vision for “developmental local government”. It shifted the focus from merely providing services to providing a central role in social and economic development. The White Paper is further discussed in Section 2.2.3.2.

- **The Organised Local Government Act (52 of 1997):** This Act explains how SALGA is legally allowed to exist in the intergovernmental architecture. SALGA operates as a professional body composed of nine provincial associations, governed by its own internal constitution established in May 2000 to ensure uniform representation across all regions. The Organised Local Government Act encapsulates the legal framework for municipalities to organise themselves into structures like SALGA, ensuring that they have a formal “seat at the table” in national processes. It creates a legal “voice” for municipalities by empowering SALGA to designate representatives to participate in the National Council of Provinces

(NCoP), ensuring local interests are considered in national law-making, thus bridging the gap between local and national levels.

Although officially recognised, SALGA is a non-statutory, autonomous employers' organisation rather than a government department. It represents municipalities as the employer within the South African Local Government Bargaining Council. As membership of the association is voluntary, SALGA is primarily funded through membership fees paid by the municipalities themselves.

- **The Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000):** This Act reinforces the embedding of municipalities within a "cooperative governance" framework. It defines the legal nature of municipalities and outlines the specific duties of the Council, the Administration, and the Community to strengthen democratic governance, aligned with the broader legislative environment. This Act is further discussed in Section 2.2.3.5.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of the Political-Administrative interface depends on the strength of these intergovernmental links. By participating in structures like SALGA and NCoP, municipalities transition from isolated administrative units into active participants in a unified, developmental state. Thus, balancing their local autonomy with national coordination, this system seeks to eliminate the administrative "silos" that often lead to service delivery failures and institutional friction.

2.2.3 Policies that determine the structure of local government organisations in South Africa

Being a constitutional democracy, the Constitution forms the guiding regulative framework for the country and, essentially, for public organisations at all levels of governance. Moreover, as is significant for this research, it is important to note that this regulative framework inspires the development of all other policies that guide the structure, functions, and operations of local government organisations. The White Paper on Local Government (1998), the Municipal Demarcation Act (27 of 1998), the Municipal Structures Act (117 of 1998), and the Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000) are the central policies that direct the functioning of local government organisations. Therefore, these policies are discussed below as they form the primary regulatory apparatus for municipal operations in South Africa. Within the framework of this study, and considering the goals of this research, all other policies are secondary to these regulatory documents.

Ultimately, this study shows that these policies act as a structural blueprint for the municipality. By fixing the boundaries, the budget, and the organisational design at a macro level, they set the parameters for inter- and intra-organisational functioning. However, because this blueprint lacks context-specific criteria, it creates a structural mismatch that destabilises the politics-administration interface from the onset.

2.2.3.1 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996

Chapters 3,4,7 and 10 of the Constitution particularly discuss aspects associated with the administration of public institutions, and by reference, local government organisations. While Chapter 7 of the Constitution outlines local government legislation, Chapter 3 describes cooperative governance. Sections 40 and 41 of Chapter 3 and Sections 151-164 of Chapter 7 indicate the legislative obligations of the three tiers of government to work collaboratively and cooperatively. These sections of the Constitution also outline the functions of municipalities and their structuration according to designated categories and form the basis of the Municipal Structures Act (117 of 1998) and the Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000) discussed in subsequent sub-sections. Chapters 4 and 10 of the Constitution also deal with public organisational functioning.

Essentially, Chapter 4 provides guidelines on how parliament is set up and highlights the structures and functioning of parliament, where decisions are made, and policies are passed. This is an important aspect of the institutional framework as parliament is the legislative core of the country, and by implication, of public organisations too. Chapter 10, however, describes the administration of public organisations. Notably, Section 195 (1a) of Chapter 10 highlights the need to enhance human potential in the administration of the public service, which, within the context of this study, likely refers to job satisfaction, productivity and, evidently, communication satisfaction, as these elements are interrelated, as discussed and unpacked in the literature review chapter that follows.

These elements of the Constitution guide the development of all subsequent legislation related to municipal functions, thereby defining the legislative boundaries of local government organisations. Consequently, stemming from these mandates underwritten in the Constitution, the White Paper on Local Government (1998) was born. The White Paper set out broad policies to set the transformation of local government in motion after the transition to democracy and served as the foundational framework that led to the conceptualisation of all other policies related to local government administration and functioning. In other words, after the Constitution, the

White Paper on Local Government is the principal document that calls attention to local government legislation.

2.2.3.2 The White Paper on Local Government (1998)

While the Constitution establishes the overarching legal mandate, the White Paper on Local Government (1998) acts as the primary policy instrument used to translate these broad constitutional principles into a workable model for local governance. It is still a defining policy document in South Africa, from which all subsequent policies related to local government transformation and functioning originate. The White Paper addresses the policy requirements for framing cooperative governance, local government political and administrative systems, municipal demarcation, and aspects relating to the institutional system (South Africa 1998b). Nkhahle (2015:24) argues that, while the White Paper on Local Government describes various challenges at the local level, it provides a framework for a "model" system of local government and does not take into account context-specific dilemmas plaguing individual municipalities. While this may have been appropriate for the time when the white paper was developed, it also contributed to the structural and systemic flaws which have emerged over time. This has made implementation far more challenging, creating the conditions for crisis management and unstructured decision-making. Sharp shifts in policy direction from the national level have had the unintended consequence of increasing vulnerability in the local government system.

Consequently, the operational shift toward integrated development planning requires political leadership and the administration to align around long-term goals. This alignment brings to the fore the inherent complexities of the Political-Administrative Interface, particularly as planning is synchronised with national priorities. However, the effectiveness of this synchronisation is undermined by the policy's failure to account for the unique socio-economic and institutional realities inherent to different municipal contexts.

2.2.3.3 The Municipal Demarcation Act (27 of 1998)

Municipal Demarcation Act No. 27 of 1998 represents a foundational milestone in South Africa's constitutional democracy. Mandated by the new Constitution, adopted in 1996, it established the Municipal Demarcation Board (MDB) as an independent authority to define the boundaries of the entire Republic. This Act provides the spatial logic for local governance, determining whether an area is classified as a single Category A (metropolitan) municipality or a combination of Category B (local) and Category C (district) municipalities. For the purposes of this study, the Act is viewed as the "jurisdictional architect" that defines the physical environment in which the Political-Administrative interface must function.

The Municipal Demarcation Act is central to the structural functioning of the administration and the geographic complexity it must manage. A larger or fragmented boundary inherently increases the administrative workload, requiring more specialised departments and infrastructure. In other words, “administrative prosperity” is entirely dependent on whether the demarcated area has the economic density to fund the professional staff required by law.

The Act’s implementation often reveals a structural mismatch. When boundaries are determined to achieve political or social integration without sufficient context-specific monitoring of fiscal viability, the administration is left under-resourced. This creates a “workspace” that lacks the financial fuel to support its legislative obligations. In such cases, the administration is set up for failure regardless of how well the Political-Administrative interface cooperates.

2.2.3.4 The Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998

The Municipal Structures Act (117 of 1998), including its 2016 amendments, provides the legal framework for the meso-level organisational design of local government. Its primary function is to define the specific types of municipalities that can exist within each category (A, B, and C) and to regulate their internal systems and office bearers, as discussed in Section 2.2.1.3 above.
By determining the division of functions and powers, the Act establishes the formal hierarchy of the politics-administration interface, dictating the electoral systems and the delegated authority of executive structures. The Act also requires the administration to provide the staff and resources needed for ward committees to work. While municipalities have the freedom to set their own local rules for these committees, this mandate adds a significant layer of micro-level work to an already stretched administrative structure.

A critical flaw of this policy is its institutional rigidity. To explain, the persistent limitation of this Act is that it often imposes a complex institutional blueprint that lacks context-specific criteria for smaller or under-resourced municipalities. By requiring a rigid set of internal structures and office-bearers regardless of a municipality’s actual capacity, the Act can create a “top-heavy” organisational design. This mismatch forces the micro-level administration to manage an expansive political oversight structure, such as numerous committees and executive roles, without the corresponding fiscal or human capacity. Consequently, the Act’s “one-size-fits-all” approach to organisational design can destabilise the Political-Administrative interface, as the administration becomes overwhelmed by the structural demands of the political wing.

2.2.3.5 The Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000

The Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) sets out legislation that enables municipalities to uplift their communities by ensuring access to essential services. The Act defines the legal nature of a municipality as including the community and clarifies the executive and legislative powers of municipalities according to Chapter 2 of the Act. The aspects of this legislation of importance to this study, though, relate to the regulative requirement to establish a simple and enabling framework for the core processes of planning, performance management, resource mobilisation and organisational change, which underpin the notion of developmental local government; to provide a framework for local public administration and human resource development and are outlined in Chapter 6. Section 1 of the Act relating to the hiring of municipals has been amended by Act 7 of 2011. The legal provisions outlined in the Municipal Systems Act, particularly those pertaining to the roles and responsibilities of the Municipal Manager, underscore the legally mandated separation between the political and administrative spheres. The Political-Administrative (P-A) Dichotomy, which serves as the theoretical framework for analysing the integrity of this separation, is defined and discussed in detail in Chapter 1, alongside the specific conceptualisation of the P-A disruption as the failure of this institutional alignment.

The Municipal Systems Act (2000) defines a municipality as an integrated system of politics, administration, and the community. This Act moves beyond mere geography to establish the “rules of work”. It provides the macro-level legal basis for the meso-level (organisational) functioning of a municipality. Rather than just setting boundaries, this Act establishes the mandatory operational procedures, such as the development of Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), performance management systems, and the drafting of local bylaws. It effectively gives the municipality the legal authority to implement Council decisions and manage the daily delivery of services to the public.

The Integrated Development Plan (IDP) is a mandatory five-year plan that serves as the strategic engine for managing development within a municipal jurisdiction. Designed to turn constitutional rights into reality, the Act requires every council to adopt a single, integrated plan at the start of its term that aligns its long-term goals with an honest assessment of existing service levels. This comprehensive document must integrate the council’s development priorities with its spatial frameworks, disaster management plans, and financial strategies, all while being tied to specific performance targets. While the Act insists that these plans account for a municipality’s actual institutional capacity and resources, they must also be drafted through a formal consultative process to ensure all interested parties are included in the final approval.

While the IDP provides the strategic blueprint for the municipality's five-year development plan, its execution is enforced through a mandatory performance management system that translates these high-level goals into measurable, concrete targets. This aspect of the Act formalises the performance management system as the primary mechanism for auditing organisational effectiveness. It mandates that municipalities establish concrete, measurable targets directly linked to their IDP priorities, ensuring that administration is conducted in an economical and feasible manner. This system is not purely internal; it must be approved by the council and remains subject to regular community review.

Under this framework, the Municipal Manager (MM) bears the ultimate responsibility for the institution's administration, including the implementation of the IDP, the management of fiscal matters, and the oversight of personnel conduct. To ensure transparency, the Act requires the public disclosure of the MM's salary and benefits, while the councillors are legally bound to report back at least quarterly to their constituencies on the municipality's progress against established performance criteria.

To conclude the analysis of the Municipal Systems Act, the focus shifts to the explicit mandate for organisational design and administrative implementation. The Act requires that a municipality's internal structure be organised to reflect constitutional values, specifically by being responsive to community needs and fostering a culture of public service. To achieve this, the administration must be divided into operationally effective units with clear delegations of responsibility, ensuring that decision-making is efficient and that the working environment remains equitable. A critical requirement of the Act is that all internal roles, encompassing both political office bearers and municipal employees, must align their daily functions with the strategic priorities of the IDP. Ultimately, this framework necessitates a formal relationship between political and administrative structures to facilitate cooperation, while holding the MM legally accountable for the overall performance of the institution.

The primary flaw of the Municipal Systems Act (2000) is that it creates an institutionalised capacity paradox. While legislation acknowledges that a municipality must only establish its administration "as far as possible" within its financial means, it simultaneously mandates a highly sophisticated, multi-layered structure that is expected to be responsive, performance-oriented, and perfectly aligned with complex IDP goals. This creates a structural mismatch where the macro-level legal requirements for an "integrated" organisation far exceed the meso-level reality of limited tax bases and technical skills. By holding the MM personally accountable for the "overall performance" of this under-resourced system, the Act individualises systemic failures. This forces the micro-level interface to manage the constant friction between rigid legal expectations and a

lack of the resources required to meet them, leading to a persistent sense of institutional exhaustion at the Political-Administrative level.

2.2.4 Overview of the eThekwini Municipality

Established in 2000 under the Municipal Structures Act, *eThekwini Municipality* is a Category A, metropolitan municipality in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal. Formed by merging seven independent local councils and tribal lands, it is South Africa's third largest city, spanning approximately 2297 km2 with a population of 3.5 million. As a major economic hub, it houses the continent's busiest port and serves as a primary tourism centre. Despite its strategic importance, the municipality manages a diverse society facing significant social, economic, and governance challenges. Like other South African institutions, eThekwini continues to undergo fundamental transformation to align with the post-apartheid context and meet the service delivery needs of its growing, predominantly isiZulu-speaking population. The period following the 2016 local government elections marked a significant shift in the municipality's institutional environment. The research is focused specifically on the resulting acute P-A disruption and the institutional misalignment that characterised the relationship between the political and administrative spheres during the critical window of March 2017 to September 2017.

2.2.4.1 The City Administration

Led by the City Manager and an executive team, the administration manages a multi-billion-rand annual budget dedicated to service delivery and the Municipal Infrastructure Investment Framework (MIIF). The city's economic viability depends entirely on effective revenue collection, sustainable budgeting, and transparent financial reporting. To manage this scale, the administration was divided into seven clusters, each responsible for its own planning and budget alignment within the broader city strategy. The administrative clusters, in 2016-2027, were as follows:

- governance and international relations,
- economic development and planning,
- human settlements, engineering, and transportation,
- community and emergency services,
- corporate and human resources,
- finance; and
- trading services.

The empirical segment of the study focused on all seven administrative clusters, as well as the City Manager's Operations Office and the Office of the City Manager.

eThekwini's organisational transformation agenda is driven by a dual focus on service delivery outputs (what is delivered) and operational methodology (the management structure). Under this model, the City Manager (CM) leads this system, supported by seven Deputy City Managers (DCMs) who oversee the clusters. The clusters are further divided into units (32 in total), overseen by unit heads. Some units are further divided into departments. The communication structure of the administration is organised as follows:

- **The City Manager (CM)** acts as the primary interface, reporting to the Council, Executive Committee, Mayor, and Speaker,
- **Deputy City Managers (DCMs)** report to the CM,
- **Unit Heads** report to their respective DCMs, and
- **Departments** report to their Unit Heads.

2.2.4.2 Political structure of eThekwini Municipality (elected officials)

While this research focuses on the city administration, a discussion of the political structure of eThekwini Municipality cannot be overlooked, as it is a critical component of the institutional environment that serves as the primary body for policy formulation and decision-making. The Council's approvals or rejections directly shape the municipality's structure and operational capacity. This structure explains why the City Manager (CM) faces a complex professional challenge.

Instead of reporting to a single authority, the CM must navigate the specific executive objectives of the mayor; the multi-party negotiations within EXCO, and the procedural oversight of the Speaker. Every administrative action must remain compliant with these distinct political and legislative requirements, placing the CM at the centre of a conflict between technical operational requirements and political demands.

This political hierarchy is organised as follows:

- **Councillors:** Elected every five years, the Council consists of ward councillors and proportional representation candidates. This dual system ensures both local geographic representation and political party-proportional seat allocation.
- **Mayor**: As the chairperson of the Executive Committee, the Mayor exercises delegated executive powers and performs ceremonial duties as mandated by the Council or the Executive Committee.
- **Executive Committee (EXCO)**: Functioning as the principal management committee, EXCO consists of ten members. Its composition is proportionally representative of the parties in Council, ensuring that various political interests are included in the primary decision-making body that recommends actions to the full Council.

- **Support Committees:** These are advisory bodies to the EXCO, chaired by EXCO members. They provide a platform for every councillor to serve on at least one committee that oversees specific municipal portfolios.
- **Office of the Speaker:** An impartial chairperson selected by the Council to manage proceedings, enforce the Code of Conduct for Councillors, and ensure the legislative integrity of the municipality. By virtue of the office (ex officio), the Speaker holds a seat on all municipal committees to ensure legislative integrity and procedural compliance, though they do not possess voting rights within those committees.

2.2.4.3 Policies that structure communication within the eThekwini Municipality

According to the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) strategic plan, internal communication is a core component of service delivery. In 2006, the Cabinet mandated the strengthening of internal communication to ensure public servants are informed and mobilised to meet state objectives. These mandates are still reinforced (GCIS 2025a; GCIS 2025b; CoGTA 2020).

Effective internal communication at eThekwini is structured around several key principles:

- **Top-Down Alignment:** Strategic messages from management must filter down to all levels to ensure every employee understands the purpose, goals, and direction of the government.
- **Bottom-up Feedback:** Robust methods must exist for employees to provide feedback to upper management, creating a two-way dialogue.
- **Organisational Performance:** Consistent communication is viewed as a tool to keep staff focused, committed, and productive by aligning individual activities with the institution's broader goals.
- **Strategic Integration:** A department's internal communication strategy must be guided by its own strategic objectives, the National Communication Strategy Framework, and the State of the Nation Address (SONA). A department's internal communication strategy should emerge from, and be guided by, among other things, the department's strategic objectives and its communication strategy, the national communication strategy framework, and the state of the nation address. These formal policies and administrative guidelines provide the mandated administrative blueprint and operational baseline against which the subsequent empirical analysis of the P-A disruption and its bearing on internal communication must be measured. Their existence is crucial for understanding the intended institutional structure of the municipality during the March 2017–September 2017 period.

The GCIS Strategic Plan and 2006 Cabinet mandates establish internal communication as a core driver of service delivery. At eThekwini, this framework requires a structured, two-way flow of communication: top-down messaging to align the administration with the city's goals, and bottom-up feedback to inform leadership. While not explicitly detailed, lateral (horizontal) communication is strongly implied as a requirement for "aligning everyone's activities" across the municipality's various units. By integrating these paths with the National Communication Strategy Framework (NCSF), the policy provides the operational baseline for the municipality's internal functions.

Current status of internal communication in government

In 2006, the Cabinet tasked GCIS with strengthening internal communication to ensure public servants were informed and mobilised to support government programs. Notably, the GCIS maintains this view in 2025, with the 7th Administration (2024-2029) reinforcing these principles through the National Communication Strategy Framework (NCSF) (GCIS 2025a; GCIS 2025b). This framework requires messaging to move beyond basic updates and align with the Government's Programme of Action (PoA) and Batho Pele principles, ensuring every public servant understands the state's direction and acts as an "ambassador" for government services.

The policy defines a multi-directional flow of information characterised by top-down strategic alignment and bottom-up feedback loops. While horizontal coordination is required to align activities across the municipality, lateral communication remains a largely implied necessity rather than a detailed mechanism in the primary mandates. To reach a diverse workforce, the framework encourages the adoption of a multi-channel approach, including digital platforms, physical notice boards, and face-to-face engagements. Clear messaging from top management is also key. Challenges include unclear content focus, limited media use, and weak distribution. Strategic planning is essential.

Despite these guidelines, systemic communication challenges persist, including unclear content focus and weak distribution (eThekwini Municipality 2025). Historical data and current assessments, such as those driving the District Development Model (DDM), confirm a persistent silo mentality where units operate in isolation (CoGTA 2020). This creates an administrative management challenge for the CM that requires careful strategic communication planning.

The Strategic Communications and Marketing Plan

The 2014–2019 eThekwini Communications and Marketing Strategy serves as a formal attempt to resolve the administrative management challenges by shifting from a fragmented support

function to a centralised “internal agency” model. This structural change, underpinned by the 2009 Council-adopted Communications Policy, established the Strategic Communications and Marketing to ensure that every department spoke with “one voice” aligned with the 2030 Batho Pele principles (eThekwini 2014; 2009).

Internally, the strategy aimed to turn every employee into a “brand ambassador” to build a culture of service and pride. In practice, the CM was responsible for cascading this 2030 Vision through the municipal hierarchy so that it could be translated into actual service delivery by all employees. However, this communication flow was obstructed by a silo mentality that had been formally documented in a 2007 internal survey (eThekwini 2014). The SALGA (2020) pilot findings confirm that “fragmented planning” and a lack of “horizontal alignment” between units hindered the implementation of central directives at that time. These lateral gaps meant that while the 2020 Vision was strategically aligned on paper, individual employees often remained disconnected from the broader goal (SALGA2020).

While the 2030 Vision was strategically aligned on paper, the operational reality was one of “fragmented planning” where units often functioned as independent entities. This fragmentation was compounded by technical and social hurdles, such as the ineffective use of databases, language diversity, and varying literacy levels, all of which diluted the transmission of information. When coupled with negative media coverage and public cynicism, these internal failures created structural friction, where the CM became the primary point of integration, struggling to manually bridge the gaps between disconnected units, forcing a unified service delivery out of a fragmented administration (CoGTA 2020).

Thus, the city faced several communication challenges that hindered this vision. These included a persistent silo mentality, limited funding, weak stakeholder engagement, poor information flow, and general reluctance to share key details between departments. Other documented issues included negative media coverage, public cynicism, an underdeveloped organisational culture, low staff engagement, difficulty attracting skilled personnel, and poor internal coordination. Furthermore, the municipality struggled with using its database effectively, addressing language diversity and literacy levels, and managing multiple brands across its communication efforts (eThekwini Municipality 2014; 2017).

Communications Policy of the eThekwini Municipality Communications Unit (As adopted by Council on 29.4.09)

The eThekwini Municipality's communication policy promotes two-way communication with stakeholders and outlines clear guidelines, roles, and responsibilities. It ensures coordinated, timely, accurate, and accessible communication of services, achievements, and priorities, aligning with both Council Units' and government-wide communication strategies to strengthen transparency, accountability, and stakeholder engagement. The Municipality uses various communication tools to engage staff, including newsletters, posters, notice boards, intranet, workshops, staff meetings, toilet notice boards, SMS, and pay slips. These mediums ensure effective communication with employees. However, the implementation of this policy is dependent on the effective flow of communication from heads of units to their departments.

Hierarchy of communication roles and responsibilities

To ensure effective communication alignment with compliance and strategy, the Municipality adopts a structured hierarchy of roles:

- **The Mayor:** Serves as the Chief Communicator, setting annual priorities alongside the City Manager (CM) and the Strategic Management Team.
- **City Manager (CM):** Acts as the primary bridge between strategy and operations. The CM is responsible for integrating communication into all city planning and aligning the annual strategy with municipal goals.
- **Heads of Units (HoU):** These officials are the "gatekeepers" of departmental info. They must ensure policy compliance, handle media inquiries for their sector, and develop specific communication action plans.
- **Head of Communication:** Coordinates all communications activities, approves service providers, and serves as the lead advisor on communication matters to the Mayor and CM.
- **Municipal Spokesperson:** Manages the media interface, including maintaining media relations, press conferences, media queries, and speechwriting for the office bearers.
- **Communications Unit and Cluster Officers:** Perform a supporting role to the Mayor and CM**,** coordinating all municipal communication activities, providing strategic advice, developing communication plans, and producing publications. Dedicated officers manage communication for each cluster, handling campaigns, events, and communications materials.
- **Communication Forum:** A quarterly forum facilitates horizontal information sharing and coordination, while the internal communications team enables the flow of HR and program updates to all employees.

2.3 SUMMARY

A general overview and contextualisation of the local government sector in South Africa, and the eThekwini Municipality in particular, was given to lay the general groundwork for the understanding of internal communication of organisations seeped in an institutional environment. A multifaceted approach to analysing the communication processes within public entities has been proposed, as insight into the macro, meso, and micro environmental forces would clarify how institutional values permeate within organisations. It was also argued that analysing the internal communication practices within government organisations presents an avenue not only for multilevel but multidisciplinary research, taking into consideration P-A disruptions in the institutional environment.

This chapter, therefore, focused on the importance of identifying and understanding the specific and unique environmental characteristics of the public sector in South Africa when making practical decisions regarding internal communication within these organisations. The governing bodies of these industries expect enhanced overall public administration and service delivery, which can be positively influenced by effective internal communication in this sector. Chapter three provides the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study.

CHAPTER 3: UNDERSTANDING THE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION OF PUBLIC ORGANISATIONS WITHIN THEIR INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter presented the background of the South African public sector in general, discussing how local government fits into the three-tier government system of South Africa. Subsequently, an orientation of South African local government in general, and the *eThekwini Municipality* specifically, was presented to understand the environment within which municipalities function. Building on this contextual foundation, this chapter critically reviews the literature that informs the study's theoretical and conceptual grounding for understanding employee internal communication satisfaction within the institutional context of local government organisations.

Kumar (2019:66) and Terre Blanche et al. (2008:20) explain that a theoretical framework is a systematic and logical structure of relevant theoretical knowledge that underpins a research study and guides its conceptual development, creating a theoretical and conceptual link between the research findings of the study under investigation and the existing body of knowledge within the particular field of study. Approached from a multilevel and multidisciplinary perspective, the theoretical framework draws on neo-institutional theory (NIT), public administration literature, the communicative constitution of organisations (CCO) perspective, and communication satisfaction literature to provide a holistic understanding of employee internal communication satisfaction within local government organisations. The framework adopted for this study builds on Lammers and Barbour's (2006) proposed "institutional theory of organisational communication", which denotes the burgeoning interest in organisational communication research from a NIT stance to investigate the institutional dynamics that constitute organisations and provides a conceptual bridge between macro-level institutional forces, meso-level organisational dynamics, and micro-level employee communication experiences. Together, these perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for examining communication satisfaction within local government organisations against the backdrop of the institutional environment in which they operate.

Within this framework, NIT serves as the meta-theoretical lens for understanding how institutional forces shape public organisations. Public administration literature provides insight into the bureaucratic structures and administrative characteristics of local government organisations, while organisational communication literature, particularly the CCO perspective and

communication satisfaction literature, provides an understanding of how communication constitutes organisations and shapes employees' communication experiences. The integration of these perspectives enables an examination of communication satisfaction that extends beyond communication processes alone to include the broader institutional context within which those processes occur.

The significance of an institutional framework for the analysis of organisational functioning has been established in light of the arguments presented thus far. It indicates an opportunity to generate research that uses a multilevel and multidisciplinary approach to assess the intricate nature of local government organisations and their interactions with the environment. For this reason, the perusal of literature from all three fields encompasses a comprehensive theoretical and empirical analysis of the influence of wider institutional forces on the meso and micro levels within public organisations and municipalities, in particular, which forms the basis for the conceptual framework and empirical focus of this study.

Positioned within the meta-theoretical framework of NIT, this study argues that the institutional environment of public organisations influences the design, structure, and administration of public organisations, which in turn influences internal communication processes. This chapter thus begins with NIT as the meta-theoretical framework in Section 3.2. Guided by this meta-theoretical frame, Section 3.3 draws on public administration literature to explore the bureaucratic and administrative characteristics of public organisations and their implications for public organisations. Section 3.4 unpacks the CCO perspective and the role of communication in constituting organisational reality. Finally, Section 3.5 focuses on communication satisfaction and its relevance to understanding employees' internal communication experiences within local government organisations. Together, these sections provide the theoretical and conceptual foundation for the empirical investigation undertaken at eThekwini Municipality and are synthesised in the conceptual framework presented in Figure 3.1.

Although the theoretical discussion could be approached in various ways and from different angles, for this study, the theoretical framework is based on NIT, public administration, and organisational communication literature (more specifically, the communicative constitution of organisations theory (CCO) and internal communication satisfaction literature). The aim is to highlight how the institutional environment encourages bureaucratic structuration in public organisations that have a presumed bearing on how internal communication is approached, managed, and practised within these organisations. This integrative perspective aligns with Lammers and Barbour's (2006) proposed institutional theory of organisational communication

and supports a multidimensional approach that theoretically and empirically bridges macro-level institutional analysis, meso-level organisational structures, and micro-level communication processes (Lawrence & Shadnam 2008:2292). Traditionally, organisational communication scholarship has focused on intra-organisational communication processes, such as channels, messages, and information flows, but there is a paucity of literature that explicates the influence institutional forces have on internal communication practices (Lammers 2011:154; Lammers & Barbour 2006:357). Likewise, NIT focuses on some micro-phenomena, but areas of research that focus on message design, dissemination and discourse are still emergent and can be supplemented by organisational communication scholarship (Hardy 2011:192).

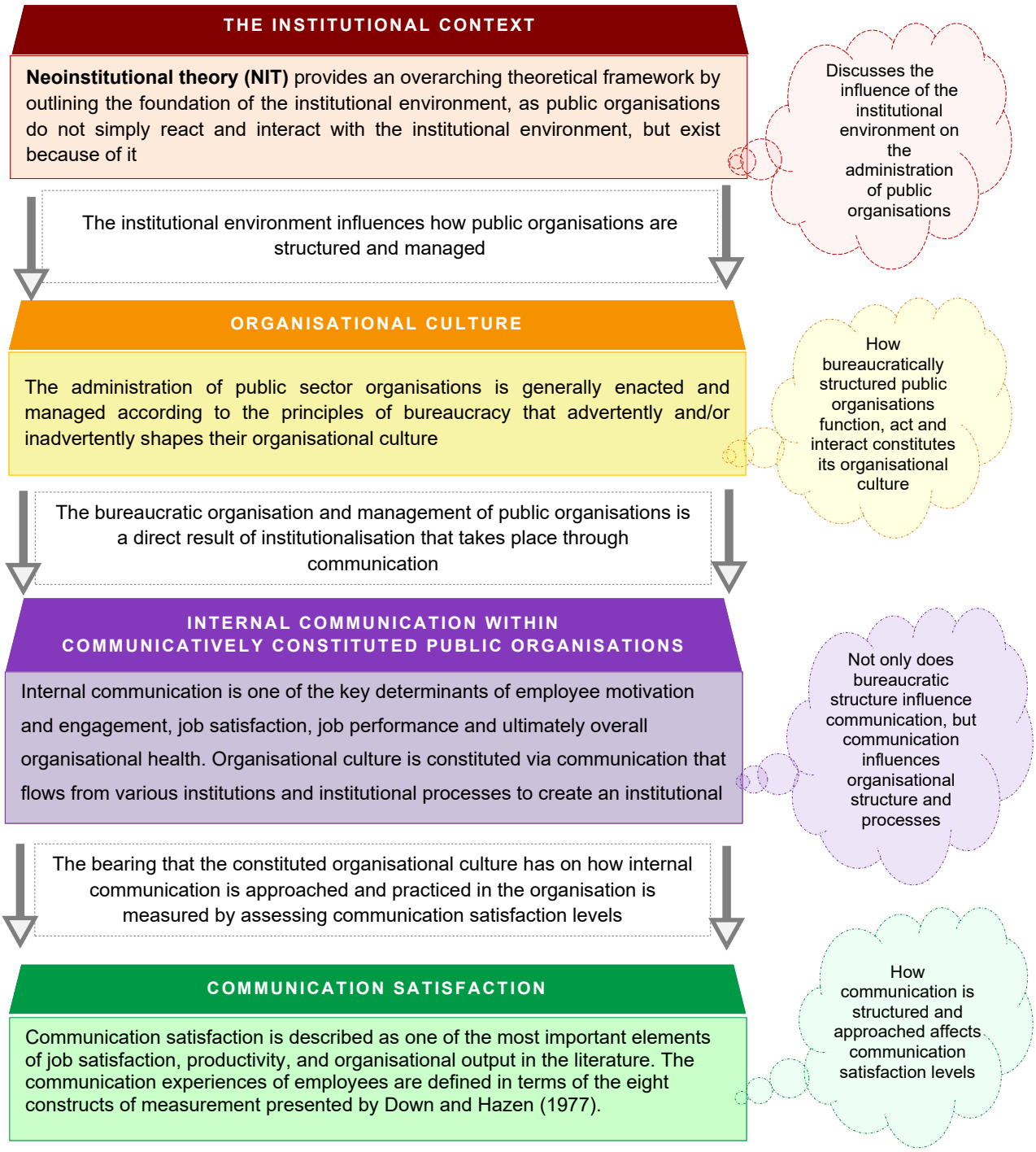


Figure 3.1: The theoretical and conceptual framework of the study of internal communication in public organisations

Source: Developed by Ashiya Osman (2026), based on neo-institutional theory (NIT), public administration, the communicative constitution of organisations (CCO), and communication satisfaction literature.

Chapter 3 focuses on answering the following research questions:

Macro-level: Institutional Context

Sub-Problem 1

RQ 1.1. What is the institutional context within which public organisations function?

RQ 1.3. What bearing does the institutional context have on how internal communication is managed in public organisations during periods of disruption?

Meso-level: Organisational Culture

Sub-Problem 2

RQ 2.1. What is the organisational culture of public organisations in which local municipalities function?

RQ 2.2. What bearing does the organisational culture have on how internal communication is managed in public organisations?

Micro-level: Internal Communication and Satisfaction

Sub-Problem 3

RQ 3.1. How are internal communication and communication satisfaction managed in public organisations?

This literature review chapter explores the theories and outlines the delimitations that lead to the conceptual framework. As NIT forms the meta-theoretical basis of this study, it is discussed in this first segment of the literature review chapter.

3.2 THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF PUBLIC ORGANISATIONS: NEO-INSTITUTIONAL THEORY (NIT) AS META-THEORY

Neo-institutional theory (NIT) is a broad theoretical framework that provides insight into organisational behaviour as situated in and influenced by institutional forces. NIT provides an understanding of the institutional positioning of the public organisation and how the institutional context sets the tone for the dominant organisational culture within these entities. The seminal work of Phillip Selznick (1957) reflects the dominant conceptualisations of macro-level institutional thinking work and paved the way for NIT and provided scholars, such as DiMaggio and Powell and Meyer and Rowan with the impetus to study the wider institutional context of organisational existence, which was largely neglected in organisational scholarship at the time (Silva et al. 2023:74; Harmon, Green & Goodnight 2015:76; Lammers 2009:521; Lawrence &

Shadnam 2008:2289; Meyer 2008:789; Selznick 1996:271; Selznick 1957:4). NIT focuses on the symbolic nature of the organisation's structure within organisational fields and explains how institutional forces facilitate the persistence of bureaucratic structures in public organisations at the meso-level (DiMaggio & Powell 1991:12; Greenwood et al. 2008:3; Lawrence & Shadnam 2008:2290; Meyer & Rowan 1977:345; Tolbert & Zucker 1996:178). Neo-institutional thinking has evolved to include an understanding of how institutionally mandated norms and practices filter from the macro environment to the meso- and micro-environments of organisations, paying attention to institutionalised internal activities and communication processes (Frumkin & Galaskiewicz 2004:285; Thoenig 2003:129; Zucker 1987:444).

Scholars such as Lammers and Barbour (2006) accentuate this interest in the micro level of analysis in their proposal of an "institutional theory of organisational communication" (Lammers & Garcia 2014:191; Grandien & Johansson 2012:215; Consiglio et al. 2010:2; Powell & Colyvas 2008:277; Lammers & Barbour 2006:357). In light of the important bearing that the institutional context has on the internal communication processes in local government organisations, the basic assertions of NIT within the context of local government organisations are put forward and applied to advance the understanding of internal communication processes in this sector. The following section focuses on these assertions and discusses them from an organisational communication perspective.

3.2.1 The three pillars of institutions

According to NIT, three elements constitute institutions in general and facilitate the construction, establishment, and maintenance of institutions (Tjilen, Lekatompessy, Maturbongs & Fitriani. 2021:443; Francovich 2018; Thoenig 2012:188; Scott & Meyer 1994:36; DiMaggio & Powell 1991:9). Scott and Meyer (1994:38) characterise the regulative, normative, and cultural cognitive elements as the three interconnected pillars of institutions that "form a continuum moving from the conscious to the unconscious, from the legally enforced to the taken for granted". Institutions may be sustained by one pillar initially, but may later be supported by different pillars depending on varying situations. Each of these elements manifests within local government organisations and has a bearing on how internal communication is managed. Therefore, none of the elements can be left out of the discussion and understanding of the functioning of local government organisations. Although these pillars, illustrated in Figure 3.2, are discussed and depicted separately, they generally intertwine and impact each other in a way that is rarely discernible in public sector organisational functioning, which is also evident in the discussions presented in this thesis. Therefore, although the basis of the institutional environment for local government

organisations stems from the regulative pillar, and is discussed as such, the normative and cultural-cognitive pillars are inadvertently interwoven with the regulative pillar and beckon attention in the discussion of the institutional environment in this thesis.

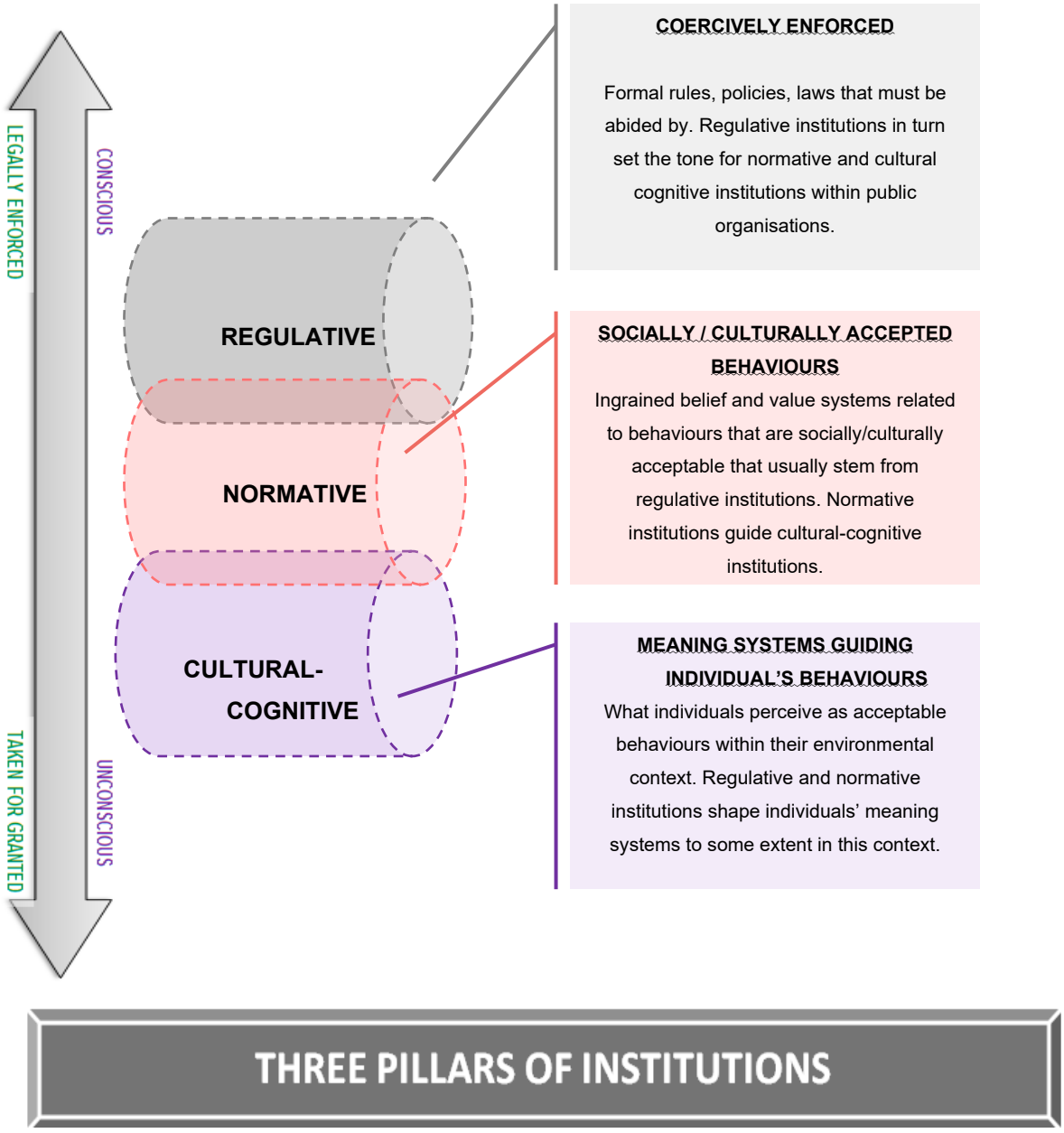


Figure 3.2: A graphic depiction of the three interconnected pillars of institutions evident in public organisations

Adapted from Scott's (2014) delineation of the three pillars of institutions

The foundation of the regulative pillar lies in the powers of the government and political structures that enforce behavioural compliance via rules, regulations, legal statutes, and formal policies

(Scott 2008:52). In the South African context, regulatory bodies, such as national and provincial government as well as municipal councils, formulate laws and policies to which municipalities are compelled to abide in the administrative aspect of its mandate (Scott & Meyer 1994:38).

The Constitution, Act 108 of 196, is the first and foremost guiding regulatory document that forms the basis of all other legislation and policies that direct the functions of local government organisations, of which Chapter 10 provides guidelines for the administration of public organisations (South Africa 1996). The regulative framework that guides South African local government organisations is discussed at length in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

The regulative pillar ensures compliance through legal frameworks and formalised regulations (Tjilen et al. 2021: 443; Chaney & Slimane 2014:97; Scott 2008:53; Hoffman 2001:179). Therefore, the regulative pillar constitutes an important determinant of organisational structuring and behaviour, particularly in local government organisations. It forms the basis for normative and cultural-cognitive pillars that embody the guiding principle for formal and impersonal communication within public organisations. What should be considered, though, is that regulative functions are not merely punitive. These structures also provide advantages and can bolster certain positive social and organisational behaviours. The problem arises when regulations become cumbersome and manifest as red tape.

While the regulative pillar emphasises legal compliance, the normative pillar rests on social and cultural conventions and traditions (Tjilen et al. 2021: 444; Chaney & Slimane 2014:97; Scott 2008:54; Hoffman 2001:173). The normative pillar is the basis of perceived acts of appropriate thinking, actions, and interactions and creates a value base for group and organisational behaviours. The organisational and social roles and positions of leadership within public organisations are usually based on normative frameworks and stem from regulative conventions (Egeberg 2012:117; Scott & Meyer 1994:63). Although the normative pillar is not based on formalised rules and regulations, these social conventions take on a rule-like regularity that can be seen as encumbering. These social conventions and value-based practices facilitate the traditional acceptance of hierarchical, impersonal, and formalised interactions as the basis of perceived efficiency and rationality that influence how internal communication is approached and practised.

The cultural-cognitive pillar is the third element of institutions. This pillar emphasises the role of the individual's internal frame of reference in relation to the environment (Tjilen et al. 2021: 444; Chaney & Slimane 2014:97; Scott 2008:58; Scott & Meyer 1994:65). In other words, the term

refers to the meanings that individuals attach to institutional messages, and "could [also] be called taken-for-granted beliefs, myths, prejudices, or clichés" (Hoffman 2001:36). This is the point where social practices and cultural norms manifest as employee behaviours within the organisation and "form[s] through the persistent presence of regulative and normative institutions" (Hoffman 2001:36). With respect to the focus of this study, this pillar creates the link between the macro and meso worlds of institutional structures and organisational fields, with the micro world of intra-organisational functioning. individuals inadvertently internalise perceptions of expected behaviours for varying social and organisational roles. As a result, they refer to their internal frames of reference, which have been shaped by an inter-subjective reality, to interpret which actions and interactions are appropriate and acceptable within an administrative bureaucracy.

The cultural-cognitive pillar, therefore, elucidates why certain actions become habituated and ritualised even without coercion (Chaney & Slimane 2014:97; Scott 2008:97). What can be understood from these arguments is that cognitive institutions "are powerfully pervasive and can both guide and misguide organizational [sic] action", as cultural norms, be they social or organisational, form the basis of acceptable behaviours (Hoffman 2001:36). Hence, as employees form the loci of attention in this study, the cultural-cognitive frame would provide insight into employee communication and behaviours within local government organisations.

3.2.2 Legitimacy, Rational Myths, and Isomorphism: Perpetuating bureaucratic culture in local government organisations

Local government organisations strive for legitimacy. While the definitions of legitimacy vary somewhat, there is consensus that "legitimacy", or "institutional integrity", refers to public organisations' aim to enhance their merit or acceptance within the regulative context (Gottschalk & Hamerton 2024:47; Bitektine & Haack 2015:50; Deephouse & Suchman 2008:50; Terry 2003:28; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:147; Tausky 1978:131). Scholars also distinguish between internal and external legitimacy (Grandien & Johansson 2012:216). While external legitimacy refers to gaining acceptance in the macro and meso milieus, internal legitimacy entails gaining acceptance within the organisation itself.

This refers to the micro level of functioning with administrative leaders making an effort to maintain and uphold institutional values in the seamless administration of the organisation (Gottschalk & Hamerton 2024:47; Grandien & Johansson 2012:216; Deephouse & Suchman 2008:54). In other words, apart from gaining external legitimacy within the institutional

environment, the organisation needs to ensure that its communication function gains validation with its internal stakeholders to strengthen the role of its internal communication strategies.

The structural components of an organisation determine the vertical and horizontal differentiation (task specialisation and centres of authority) within an organisation, while the work processes within each department are dependent on the coordination of internal communication strategies (Byrkjeflot & du Gay 2012:96; Aiken et al. 1980:636). Essentially, organisations could strive to gain external legitimacy by imitating formal organisational structures common within their operational field in the meso environment, while at the same time, managing the communication function strategically within the organisation to gain internal legitimacy. This would be an ideal situation that is difficult to implement in highly regulated environments. The interplay between structure and activities (external and internal legitimacy) indicates the existence of a parallel duality within public organisations. This perspective is significant to the study of internal communication structures within highly institutionalised local government organisations, which can explain why differentiation between structure and activities may exist in some organisations.

While authors such as Gottschalk and Hamerton (2024:49), Harmon et al. (2015:86), and Chaney and Slimane (2014:98) acknowledge the power of individuals at the organisational or micro-level to enact institutional change and influence the process of legitimation, this agency is rarely pragmatically instituted in local government organisations, as they primarily focus on instilling institutional values. The overemphasis on instilling institutional values within the organisation, however, reduces the organisation's flexibility to change and ability to innovate. In their quest for legitimacy, public organisations adopt the institutional values of rational behaviour that are subsequently portrayed in their culture, mission, strategies, communication, and overall practices.

As a result, many processes and procedures within local government organisations merely become rituals or "rational myths" that do not necessarily enhance service delivery. Hence, the concept of legitimacy is closely linked to the idea of a rational myth. A rational myth is an important term in NIT coined by Meyer and Rowan (1977:342) in their seminal article. The compulsion with the rationalisation of society began with the work of Max Weber (1947) when he coined the term the "iron cage" referring to the sprouting of the bureaucratic organisational form in Western capitalist societies at the time, as a symbol of the obsessive rational organisation of society (Ongaro 2020:138; Weber 2001:123; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:147; Weber 1947:14). It was argued, once society adopted and accepted this approach to organisation, it would be difficult to escape this "iron cage of rationality" (Weber 2001:123; Zucker 1987:446;). As much

as private organisations tend to move away from bureaucratic organisation, public organisations move towards it due to their need for institutional integrity and public accountability (Chaney & Slimane 2014:97; Grandien & Johansson 2012:216; McKenna, Garcia-Lorenzo & Bridgman 2010:129, Ashworth, Boyne & Delbridge 2009:184; Scott 2008:59; Christensen et al. 2007:38; Terry 2003:58; Dacin et al. 2002:53; Selznick 1996:271; Weber 1947:300). What this means within the framework of the current study is that once local government organisations become institutionalised, they strive to establish rationally structured entities and usually follow a hierarchical blueprint of structure, command, and control that, ideally, should enhance efficiency because of established practices, but this is not always the case. In other words, organisations adopt rational structures and practices to gain legitimacy in the institutional environment without discriminating between performance-enhancing and performance-hindering institutionally aligned practices. Hence, such a pursuit of rationality is mythical.

In other words, the bureaucratic organisational form is still widely accepted in the local government sector, not because of its association with efficiency, but in spite of it (Banton 2024; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:148). Organisational structures and processes, thus, are informed through prevailing policies, processes, and procedures that are continually adopted and practised without considering if these established practices improve work activities in reality (Meyer & Rowan 1977:340). Some of these formalised structures hinder task performance by creating redundant administrative workloads and a predominantly top-down approach to communication but continue to be enforced because they are the institutionally accepted organisational form for public sector organisations (Christensen et al. 2007:38; Selznick 1996:271).

Initial institutional compliance by organisations seems to yield great enthusiasm and optimistic performance, but as these become entrenched, their actions become ceremonial and do not necessarily enhance organisational output and service delivery if the organisations do not distinguish between institutional values that enrich workflow and those that hamper practical effectiveness, customer service, and employee satisfaction. This dissatisfaction is noted in local government performance in South Africa and the frequent citizen and employee protests (*see* Ragolane 2024; Thusi & Selepe 2023).

The adoption and practice of institutionalised conventions grants organisations institutional acceptance, while deviating from acceptable standards set by institutional forces usually leads to the demise or isolation of the organisation (Gottschalk & Hamerton 2024:47; Bitektine & Haack 2015:50; Deephouse & Suchman 2008:50; Lammers & Barbour 2006:359). Deviant organisations do not receive support, such as financial funding or material resources, nor legal

endorsement from the government (Byrkjeflot & du Gay 2012:95; McKenna et al. 2010:130; Selznick 1996:273; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:148). Therefore, despite the growing disapproval of the bureaucratic structuration of local government organisations and the call for a more flexible organisational structure, the nature and functioning of local government organisations are dependent thereon to uphold institutional integrity and position the organisation favourably within the institutional landscape. This quest for legitimacy thus has an influence on how public organisations approach and practice organisational communication.

Consequently, pursuing rational organisation places pressures on local government organisations to conform to legitimated norms, which in turn leads to the replication of organisational processes at the meso level (Gottschalk & Hamerton 2024:43; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:147). This imitation or modelling of the structures and processes of organisations within a particular field to each other in order to gain legitimacy is referred to as *isomorphism.*

Isomorphism, also known as *institutional isomorphism*, is the concept NIT scholars use to explain organisational homogeneity at the inter-organisational or meso level (Gottschalk & Hamerton 2024:44; Scott 2008:152; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:147). As organisations yield to institutional pressures to gain legitimacy in the environment, they enter the domain of institutional isomorphism, and previously dissimilar organisations tend to take on the character and structure of other organisations operating within their sector (Cornelissen et al. 2015:23; Fine & Hallett 2014:1777; Ashworth et al. 2009:166; Wooten & Hoffman 2008:132; Pugh & Hickson 2007:165; Meyer & Rowan 1977:341). This isomorphic trait can be seen in the adoption of the traditional Western model of bureaucratic organisational forms and political governance systems adopted by many African countries and continues to be implemented (Gegana & Phahlane 2024; Abugre 2014:655; Kettl & Fesler 2009:16).

Within this Western model of bureaucracies, public sector organisations thus display a greater need to conform to the isomorphic requirements within their field to reinforce their political legitimacy (Thoenig 2012:190; Clegg 2010:7). Change and transformation within these organisations do occur gradually over time, but these changes usually become imbued with recycled institutional values too (Monteiro & Adler 2021:430; Harmon et al. 2015:86; Chaney & Slimane 2014:98; Dacin & Dacin 2008:348). Institutional isomorphism is also relevant to the communication processes within an organisation. As organisations mimic formal structures, they tend to fashion their organisational communication processes on those adopted by their peers (Kauppi 2022:329; Bannerman & Haggart 2015:4). This could involve the drafting of organisational strategies, policies, and standard operating procedures as well as the selection of

channels of communication that resemble the constitutions of their peers in their field due to isomorphic pressures to conform.

Consequently, organisations adopt institutionally accepted ideals of organisational functioning due to a perception that these structures enhance rational and efficient functioning across the field in a general sense (Monteiro & Adler 2022:435; Thoenig 2012:189; Boxembaum & Jonsson 2008:80). However, as pointed out in the discussions thus far, a problem arises when organisations conform to institutional norms to the extent where organisational processes and functioning become merely ceremonial to mimic the institutional ideal of efficiency, without actually improving organisational functioning.

Generally, organisations within an organisational field face similar isomorphic pressures (Kauppi 2022:325; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:153). Coercive isomorphic pressures signify political, legal, and inter-organisational policies and contractual requirements and expectations whereby organisations abide and conform (Gottschalk & Hamerton 2024:43; Amenta & Ramsey 2010:19; Pugh & Hickson 2007:166; Lammers & Barbour 2006:360; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:153). Local government legislations, such as the Municipal Structures Act and the Municipal Systems Act for example, and Municipal Council decisions serve as coercive forces of isomorphism at this level of governance in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 2000; Republic of South Africa, 1998). These forces align with the regulative pillar of institutions discussed in Section 3.2 but relate specifically to field-level institutional dynamics. Emphasis is placed on creating a common arena of regulative authority that compels organisations within a sector to standardise to the legal structural and procedural requirements endorsed by political decision-makers who pronounce resolutions from an ivory tower and are detached from the effects of their decisions.

Apart from coercive forces of isomorphism, organisations could also look toward mimetic isomorphism by replicating the approaches of their peers when they face structural, procedural, or environmental uncertainty (Kauppi 2022:325; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:150). Organisations seek solutions to their dissonance by replicating behaviours, systems, and processes, such as management, communication, and administrative systems of peer organisations that are perceived as having gained significant legitimacy within their institutional environments (Kauppi 2022:328; Ashworth et al. 2009:167; Pugh & Hickson 2007:167; Zucker 1987:446). In summary, isomorphic forces, more likely than not, constrain organisational innovation in varying ways across the field, subsequently imposing structural and procedural isomorphism.

3.2.3 Institutional Logics and Local Government Organisation

Friedland and Alford (1991) coined the term *institutional logics* to place the supra-individual within the context of the institutionalised organisation. Institutional logics refer to the overarching belief systems and practices stemming from institutional forces that guide organisational structures and behaviours (Kauppi 2022:341; Little 2021; Jones 2010:30; Scott & Meyer 1994:60; Friedland & Alford 1991:249; Zucker 1987:445). This is an abstract term with pragmatic applications and outcomes. Institutional logics filter from authoritative forces, such as the government and authorities that govern public organisations, in the macro and meso environments and infiltrate the micro level, where these norms are enforced and are applied practically in the form of organisational identity, culture, routines, and practices.

Actors also coordinate information dissemination to key stakeholders to portray an identity that reflects the institutional ideal to gain legitimacy or face sanctions from the institutional environment (Kauppi 2022:341; Lawrence, Suddaby & Leca 2009:1; Lammers & Barbour 2006:363). Therefore, it is important to analyse the daily activities within local government organisations to gain an understanding of how employees make sense of institutional requirements and how these perceptions translate into behaviours, routines, and taken-for-granted conventions within the organisation (Little 2021; Cornelissen et al. 2015:21; Powell & Colyvas 2008:277). This view is applied and accepted for this study, as *institutional logics* as a concept allows the researcher to acknowledge the dynamics of the organisational field within a multilevel analysis.

In an alternative conceptualisation, Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury (2012:2) view the institutional logics perspective as a meta-theoretical approach for ‘‘analyzing the interrelationships among institutions, individuals, and organizations in social systems [all sic].’’ Critics of this stance claim that the said term itself is ambiguous and lacks theoretical, conceptual, and empirical boundaries (Schildt & Kodeih 2025:4; Cloutier & Langley 2013:360; Powell & Bromsley 2013:7). Additionally, although the term, within this approach, seems to be tied to gargantuan social constructions, it is empirically detached from the macro and meso orders that are crucial to NIT, as approached in this research (Schildt & Kodeih 2025:15; Glynn & Raffaelli 2013:179; Lammers 2011:155).

The institutional logics approach, thus, pays scant attention to how these logics infiltrate the organisation at the practical level of action and interaction. Hence, this study does not employ the institutional logics approach as a meta-theoretical framework, particularly due to its

uncoupling from the meso-structures, or the fields of organisational functioning and its lack of detail in explicating the micro-dynamics of the transmission of institutional logics. It can further be argued that the institutional logics approach fails to explain how institutional conventions flow into organisations and shape cognitive frames and workplace practices.

Therefore, using the concept of "institutional logics" to explain institutional dynamics and utilising the concept of "institutional messages" as the mediums through which these logics are transmitted at the micro level provides a practical linkage between the macro, meso, and micro dynamics of the institutionalised settings within which local government organisations exist (Lammers & Barbour 2006:371). Institutional messages, such as mission statements, policies, and other formal and informal communication, are more tangible manifestations of the abstract notion of institutional logics.

Actors entrench institutional values within organisations by providing appropriate information to external and internal stakeholders that are aligned with institutional policies and frameworks (Kauppi 2022:341; Lammers 2011:156; Putnam et al. 2009:3). This line of reasoning indicates that institutions and communication are inextricably linked as institutions are formed and sustained through communication and alludes to the communicative constitution of local government organisations, which is further discussed in section 3.4.1.

What can be understood from these discussions is that the message signifies institutional authority, which may inadvertently constrain interaction between superiors (the perceived senders of the message) and subordinates, entrenching institutional norms of hierarchically structured professional roles (Kauppi 2022:323; Lammers 2011:160). Not only are activities and processes routinised, but formal message construction and dissemination are also subjected to rigid repetitions and conventional guidelines to the extent of becoming rational myths (Fredriksson 2014:325; Barley 2011:200; Hardy 2011:192; Lammers 2011:157). The institutional message thus creates a pertinent link between the abstract concept of logics in NIT literature and the empirical research of messages valued in organisational communication scholarship. With this added focus on microphenomena, NIT presents a basis for a multidimensional framework for organisational analysis, as put forth in this study.

3.3 PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION THEORY: UNDERSTANDING THE ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE OF PUBLIC ORGANISATIONS

To augment the theoretical exploration of organisations in the public sector, public administration literature provides insight into the distinguishing characteristics of public sector organisations, such as bureaucratic structuration, formalisation and related practices that shape how internal communication is practised within these organisations (Al-Habil 2011:2231; Pugh & Hickson 2007:166; Gortner et al. 1987:15). These characteristics are particularly salient in local government contexts, where institutional forces reinforce bureaucratic principles that influence organisational culture and internal communication processes. Drawing on this literature, this section focuses on the structural and administrative dimensions of public organisations, with particular attention to how bureaucratic features shape internal organisational processes, especially internal communication. Rather than engaging in a comparative assessment of competing theoretical explanations, the discussion synthesises key insights that illuminate how administrative structures may shape and mediate internal communication practices within local government organisations.

Although organisational structures both constrain and enable behaviour and strategic interactions in public organisations, public administration research has often focused on individual behaviour and attitudes without explicitly linking them to organisational structure (Egeberg 2012:165). Therefore, considerations of structure are not only a necessary ingredient for understanding the complexity of the internal dynamics of public sector organisations, but they are also central building blocks for institutional design (Cornelissen et al. 2015:22; Brans 2012:522; Lammers & Barbour 2006:359). Integrating the analysis of formal structure and intra-organisational phenomena provides a more comprehensive understanding of organisational dynamics and provides explanations for institutional logics that likely infiltrate endogenous activities. Just as public administration theories add insight into the dynamics applicable to public sector organisations, organisational communication literature offers insight into the internal dynamics of organisations, leading up to an understanding of employees' internal communication experiences (Frederickson et al. 2012:73; Powell & Colyvas 2008:293; Scott 2008:193; Christensen et al. 2007:87; Scott & Meyer 1994:28; Zucker 1987:451).

Public administration is an academic and practical field, concerned with the execution of government policy within national, provincial, and local spheres, with local government being at the grassroots level of service delivery (Boddy-Evans 2020; Peters & Pierre 2012:1; Berkley & Rouse 2009:4; Kettl & Fesler 2009:9). The theory of bureaucracy, underpinned by the seminal

work of Max Weber (1947), plays a significant role in public administration theories. Theories of public administration analyse the strengths and weaknesses of bureaucracy and propose different perspectives on how to manage and improve its effectiveness in achieving public goals. Most importantly, the politics of bureaucratic structure help us better understand the dynamics of policy formulation, while examining bureaucratic structure provides insight into how policy is implemented.

Bureaucracy has been the standard model for organisational structure in public organisations since the 20th century. The principles of Fayol's (1841-1925) and Taylor's (1856-1915) scientific and classical management theories, and Weber's (1864-1920) precepts of bureaucratic structure have influenced the administration and management of public entities (Monteiro & Adler 2021:433; Byrkjeflot & du Gay 2012:86; Lynn 2012:26; Fry & Raadschelders 2008:311; Christensen et al. 2007:21; Waldo & Miller 2007:60; Shafritz & Hyde 2007:28; Miner 1982:376). "Professionalisation", "rationalisation", and "efficiency" underscore this organisational structure, which Weber referred to as the "ideal type" of bureaucracy (Ongaro 2020:138; Vogel 2014:383; Frederickson et al. 2012:2; Berkley & Rouse 2009:102). Although contemporary public administrators shy away from the terminology associated with scientific management, elements of *Tayloristic* management and bureaucratic organisation that traditionally emphasise objectivity and value efficiency and other elements of classical management remain embedded within public sector organisations.

Hierarchy, structure, and the specialisation of tasks are elements of the ideal type, that persist in the public sector due to the emphasis on technical efficiency and rational precision, simplifying the complex task of executing government policy (Boddy-Evans 2020; Shafritz & Hyde 2017:69; DeHart-Davis, Davis, & Mohr 2014:850; Lynn 2012:19; Peters & Pierre 2012:2; Whitford 2012:396; Farazmand 2009:2; Jaffee 2008:89; Sutherland & Canwell 1997:193; Gortner 1986:100). The organisation of functions into specialised units reduces variability in the coordination of tasks and reduces the arbitrary power that managers could exercise over their employees (Monteiro & Adler 2021:432; Kim 2014:8; Carruthers 2012:4; Whitford 2012:399; Yesilkagit 2010:153; Jaffee 2008:89; Sutherland & Canwell 1997:48).

Consequently, bureaucratic organisation and scientific management emphasise rigid centralisation, routinised activities, and normative administration, which can restrict the individuality of specific organisations within a field. This tendency is prevalent in public entities ever more so because of the need to establish objective and rational systems of administration within the politically charged environment of the local government sector. In light of this argument,

it can be said that the study of the structure and functioning of public organisations is seated in the principles of positivism that emphasise the impersonal "management" of employees. Local government organisations generally fall into the bracket of largely inorganic machine bureaucracies due to the institutionalisation of working practices through job and task standardisation, rigid regulations, and administrative processes. This climate of rigidity influences communication patterns amongst and between employees within a public organisation.

3.3.1 Bureaucracy, culture, governance, and red tape: Has formalisation gone too far?

Organisational culture refers to the personality of the organisation that "is socially created through the communicative performances of organizational members" [sic] (Miller 2015:78). In accordance with the focus of this study, and in line with the preceding description of the communicative constitution of organisations, Baba, Blomberg, LaBond and Adams (2013:93) describe organisational culture "as configurations or assemblages of cultural-cognitive frameworks, norms, and regulations that reflect institutional characteristics when members share the mission, vision, and assumptions about the world and how to behave therein." In other words, Baba et al. (2013) assert that the public organisation's culture is a carrier of institutional values, which is in line with Scott and Meyer's (1994:19) view of the influence of institutional forces on constituting an organisation's culture or value system. An understanding of culture and its related "structuring influences" is thus indicative of the internal communication environment of local government organisations (Nicotera 2020:10; McAleese 2016:15; Alvesson 2013:5; Barker 2013:86; Schein 2010:14; Berkley & Rouse 2009:82; Christensen et al. 2007:38; Verwey & du Plooy-Cilliers 2003:135; Franks 1989:357). Therefore, by implication, understanding organisational culture involves an analysis of the internal communication environment, such as channels of communication, working relationships, normative organisational behaviours, and other related communicative interchanges that have been influenced by institutional frameworks.

Structure influences the organisational culture within administrative bureaucracies (Little 2021; Christensen et al. 2007:45). Organisational structures, such as rules, policies, job descriptions, and organisational charts, create a framework for formal and impersonal organisational processes in bureaucracies (Monteiro & Adler 2021:434; O'Riordan 2015:11; Chen & Rainey 2014:947; Franks 1989:327; Meyer & Scott 1983; Meyer & Rowan 1977). This is known as formalisation. Formalisation is a key part of bureaucracy that helps the organisation respond to institutional pressures. While formal structures are central to understanding the administration of local government organisations, informal norms and values created to mould employee interactions are important elements of organisational culture in bureaucracies.

Structure significantly shapes organisational culture by establishing clear hierarchies, formal roles, and standardised procedures. Jones (2010:218) asserts that a "mechanistic structure is likely to give rise to a culture in which predictability and stability are desired end states," while "an organic structure is likely to give rise to a culture in which innovation and flexibility are desired end states." Machine bureaucracies exhibit a largely inflexible administrative core and a rigid chain of command that struggles to deal with non-routine or unanticipated circumstances (Monteiro & Adler 2021:427; Egeberg 2012:117; Lunenburg & Ornstein 2012:42; Jones 2010:131; Mazzei 2010:222; Sutherland & Canwell 1997:48; Verwey & du Plooy-Cilliers 2003:180). Local government organisations in South Africa fall into the category of machine bureaucracies, where emphasis is placed on authority and top-down control, which fosters a culture of obedience and rule-following, while the rigid division of labour encourages a focus on specialised tasks. Communication tends to be formal and structured, limiting the spontaneous exchange of ideas. The impersonal nature of bureaucratic structures promotes neutrality and fairness but can also dampen morale and reduce personal connections within the organisation. Employees are expected to comply with established procedures rather than take initiative or make independent decisions. Overall, bureaucratic structures create a culture that values stability, consistency, and adherence to rules, stifling creativity and flexibility through excessive formalisation. While it is argued that formalisation helps organisations enhance efficiency and effectiveness, local government organisations usually focus more on efficiency, while neglecting effectiveness (Monteiro & Adler 2021:427). Optimally functioning organisations need to be both *efficient* and *effective* to thrive.

Efficiency involves doing things well through the input of various resources, such as inter alia, a workforce, time, and finances, to achieve clearly defined organisational outputs. In other words, efficiency involves the *technical* aspects of an organisation's performance in relation to the resources utilised (Monteiro & Adler 2021:433; Bansal 2020; Walker & Andrews 2015:103). For example, an organisation lacking an employee email system prevents managers from communicating efficiently with employees, as a lot more resources are required to disseminate important messages swiftly. On the other hand*, effectiveness* involves doing the **right** things well and entails strategically implementing resources for optimised performance (Bansal 2020; Walker & Andrews 2015:103; Berkley & Rouse 2009:283). For example, a manager attempting to communicate more efficiently will consider utilising organisational emails to staff with digital access and letters to employees who lack digital access to ensure the message reaches all employees effectively.

Consequently, there is an ongoing debate in public administration discourse concerning effective and efficient administration, which presents a dilemma in local government organisations. In other words, due to various reasons, as discussed in this thesis, public organisations struggle to find the right balance between effective and efficient communication and administration to provide optimum services to their constituents.

As discussed earlier, while formalisation can improve efficiency, it can reduce morale, creativity, and motivation. (Monteiro & Adler 2021:427; O'Toole & Meier 2015:250; Byrkjeflot and du Gay 2012:104; Frederickson et al. 2012: 76; Whitford 2012:395; Kettl & Fesler 2009:51, Christensen et al. 2007:15). The problem is “excessive” formalisation and centralisation, which often implies “red tape” that can be expected to restrict the range and efficacy of communication channels available for disseminating information (Blom et al. 2020:8; Chen & Rainey 2014:946; Pandey & Garnett 2006:39). Restricted communication capability within an organisation is prone to reduce employees’ motivation to seek or provide essential information. These problems usually appear later in an organisation’s life, when rules become excessive or are no longer helpful, especially when a mechanistic structure falls into place.

“Red tape” refers to excessive or oppressively complex bureaucracy, denoting cumbersome administrative rules and regulative requirements that entail a compliance burden for the organisation (Kaufmann, Borry & DeHart-Davis 2019:237; Lotter 2011:11). This creates delays in carrying out tasks efficiently and effectively. “Formalisation” differs from “red tape” and does not always lead to adverse consequences. Employees, for the most part, voluntarily comply with formal rules when they are implemented consistently, and stakeholders clearly understand the objectives thereof (Blom, Borst & Voorn 2020:8; Chen & Rainey 2014:946; Lotter 2011:11). In other words, formalisation signifies objectivity not uncertainty (Kaufmann et al. 2019:237; Chen & Rainey 2014:946; Pandey & Garnett 2006:39). This may result in optimised performance providing that those rules are considered to be acceptable and adequate. Hence, it can be argued that red tape refers to rigid and inflexible lines of command and communication that lose their usefulness and reliability as information channels due to “excessive” and cumbersome bureaucratic administration.

Red tape primarily affects internal communication performance, since most rules and constraints focus on internal processes, rather than external interactions. While public managers do not create red tape, they struggle with it within bureaucratic systems (Pandey & Welch 2005; Scott & Pandey 2005; Pandey, Kingsley & Scott 2001). Red tape limits communication in two ways: it restricts the number of communication channels; and it decreases motivation to seek or share information. As Pandey and Garnett (2006) metaphorically describe, rigid communication lines

lose their usefulness, like blood vessels that become blocked. Red tape constrains internal communication, often instituted by structural forces that are beyond public managers' control.

3.3.2 The dissension between politics and administration in public organisations and the paradox of accountability: Political legitimacy for public administration

Stemming from a model developed in the late nineteenth century, the roles and functions of the policy-making body of government were separated from the administrative functions of government institutions in what was known as the politics-administration dichotomy (Terrance & Uwizeyimana 2023:172; EKU 2022; Petridou 2020:3; Frederickson, Smith, Larimer & Licari 2012:46; Kettl & Fesler 2009:15; Fry & Raadschelders 2008:308; Shafritz & Hyde 2007:7; Waldo 1978:589). It is important to note that the politics-administration dichotomy “does not account for or explain the details or nuances in a particular pattern of political-bureaucratic interaction” but signifies structural separation (Frederickson et al. 2012: 19).

The politics-administration dichotomy was created to separate administration from politics, aiming for a neutral, value-free realm that would reduce corruption and improve efficiency (EKU 2022; Brans 2012:523; Whitford 2012:393; Fry & Raadschelders 2008:12). It reserved policymaking for elected officials. However, the growing overlap between policy and administration, along with the recognition that civil servants contribute to policy, led to the rejection of this dichotomy (Terrance & Uwizeyimana 2023:165). This view suggests that administration and politics are closely linked, with politics influencing even basic administrative functions. While blending them too much may overlook key aspects of bureaucracy, the politics-administration dichotomy persists due to the tension between the two. One solution is to see them as dimensions, with politics focusing on responsiveness and administration on efficiency.

Public administration remains part of the political process, balancing democratic review with the need for efficiency. Politico-administrative relations impact bureaucratic dynamics, civil servants' policy-making behaviour, and administrative discretion, influencing change and the integration of political and administrative elites (Brans 2012:525; Whitford 2012:393). This approach has been applied in some European nations, but not effectively in Africa or South Africa (Terrance & Uwizeyimana 2023:164; Hyden 2012:604; Olowu 2012:615; Thompson 2012:133; Hyden 2010:76). Irrespective of the debates regarding the politics-administration rhetoric, the structural separation of these two functions of the State (policymaking and administration) persists. In the case of local government organisations in South Africa, this separation is noted in the role of the mayor as head of the political structure (elected officials), and the role of the city manager as head of the administrative function (organisational administrators) of the municipality (Terrance & Uwizeyimana 2023:163; ESU 2022; Petridou 2020:4; Painter & Peters 2010:5; Fry &

Raadschelders 2008:308; Reddy 1996:54). This notion of the structural separation of the administrative and political functions of government institutions coupled with the persistence of the bureaucratic structure of public organisations, explains the frequent association of the term "administrative bureaucracy" and "public administration" to public organisations (Petridou 2020:4; Trondal & Veggeland 2014:57; Frederickson et al. 2012:76; Rainey 1992:111). Insight into how this complex administrative process influences internal communication processes within local government organisations forms an important component of this study.

Public bureaucracies are accountable to the governance systems of their specific countries and jurisdictions, hence rendering "accountability" a central concern of both the study and the practice of public administration (Thusi & Selepe 2023:690; Murphy 2019; Thomas 2012:673; Painter & Peters 2010:8). Accountability in public organisations embodies both "upward" accountability to ministers and parliament, and "downward" and "horizontal' accountability" to other peer organisations (Gregory 2012:687). While controversy surrounds the concept of accountability, for the purposes of this study, accountability involves an expectation of the fulfilment of specified tasks and responsibilities, ideally based on certain agreed-upon criteria determined through regulative structures (Ozga 2020:19; Gregory 2012:686; Thomas 2012:673; Painter & Peters 2010:8). Accountability is thus linked to rewards and sanctions for performance or non-performance respectively in accordance with pre-set measures. The rewards and penalties could be tangible (such as promotion or demotion, or increased or reduced autonomy), or symbolic (such as the assignment of credit or blame, or honour or humiliation) (Ledger 2020; Thomas 2012:73; Gregory 2012:687; Painter & Peters 2010:8).

The common response to perceived accountability issues is to tighten formal bureaucratic controls and increase regulation to manage discretionary authority (Kaufmann, Borry & DeHart-Davis 2019:237; Gregory 2012:691; Merton 1940:562). This approach leads to a positive correlation between administrative discretion and complex bureaucratic structures. However, this tightening of control can result in "goal displacement," where the means of accountability become the ends in themselves. Thus, shifting the focus to adhering to rules rather than achieving effective outcomes. This creates a cycle where regulations and controls reinforce each other, often leading to unintended consequences. Red tape, while seen by some as a safeguard, is generally viewed as a constraint-driven, rule-obsessed bureaucracy that attracts stakeholder disapproval and becomes a target for reform.

3.3.3 Addressing the dysfunctions of bureaucracy and related administrative implications through administrative reforms

The term "bureaucracy" has negative and positive connotations (Monteiro & Adler 2021:434; Harris, Clegg & Hopel 2011:4; Clegg 2011:204). Negatively, it refers to inefficient, impolite civil servants constrained by red tape, or powerful individuals abusing their authority. Positively, it describes a formal, rational system for organising and structuring complex public and private organisations (Monteiro & Adler 2021:434; Al-Habil 2011; Berkley & Rouse 2009:99; Kettl & Fesler 2009:5; Aiken et al. 1980:631). In this research, bureaucracy refers to public organisations and the formal relationships among individuals with administrative authority to implement public programmes. Despite its negative image, bureaucracy plays a vital role in managing administrative functions.

Bureaucracy is often criticised for waste, inefficiency, rigid rules, and red tape. As legislation cannot account for all eventualities, discretion becomes important for public servants. This discretionary power leads to dysfunctions, such as inflexibility and an unwillingness to adapt to citizens' needs (Monteiro & Adler 2021:435; Persson & Goldkuhl 2010:52; Newman 2005:193). This is especially the case when policy implementation requires situational adjustments in unpredictable and unstable environments. Weber saw bureaucracy as impersonal. However, it has benefits, including impartiality and professionalism (Monteiro & Adler 2021:438; Berkley & Rouse 2009:100). These qualities promote uniformity, predictability, and equality. It is argued that bureaucracies rely on rigid rules, which make them resistant to change. While this can limit flexibility, it can ensure consistency and order, as focusing on rules helps maintain reliability in administrative processes.

There are contradictory scholarly views on the ideal type of bureaucracy. These views often emphasise its positive functions, while neglecting relevant intra-organisational challenges (Monteiro & Adler 2021:441; Shafritz & Hyde 2007:98). Public sentiment reflects an alternative view, focusing more on the imperfections of the ideal type of bureaucracy. Concepts like Veblen's "trained incapacity" and Dewey's "occupational psychosis" explain how bureaucratic structures can lead to biases and the depersonalisation of relationships. These ideas suggest that rigid training and skills, though effective in the past, may become inadequate in changing conditions. This lack of flexibility can result in maladjustments and inappropriate responses to new challenges.

In this light, administrative reforms have challenged the hierarchical structure of public administration (Peters & Pierre 2012:7). Hierarchies are seen as rigid, inefficient, and unable to use professional expertise. They also struggle with client relations and customer service, due to the cumbersome lines of command. The public sector reform agenda aims to clarify the balance between political control and administrative autonomy. Change is broader, while reform is a deliberate, planned process driven by political or managerial decisions, where "New Public Management" sought to enhance managerial autonomy while asserting political control Christensen 2012:577; Lodge, 2012:551). Administrative reforms aim to improve public sector structures, but discrepancies often exist between ideas, policy, and implementation due to contextual variations and historical-institutional legacies.

Since the 1960s, public administration in Africa has undergone reforms, with the 1970s focusing on developmental changes inspired by Western models and best practices (Molobela & Uwizeyimana 2023:328; Terrance & Uwizeyimana 2023:164; Olowu 2012:609). Over the past five decades, African states have faced deep issues in public administration, including lack of trust, transparency, and accountability, skill deficits, over-reliance on external resources, centralisation, disconnect from relevant knowledge, and weak regulatory capacity in collaborating with the private sector and NGOs. Investing in a knowledgeable, professional, motivated, and non-corrupt civil service is crucial for modernising public administration, with leaders collaborating across sectors for effective governance and development. Governments worldwide often fail to learn from past reforms. Applying private sector tools to public organisations does not ensure success, as reforms like NPM vary across countries, sectors and levels (Terrance & Uwizeyimana 2023:331; Christensen 2012:586; Olowu 2012:609; Christensen & Laegreid, 2007:1061). In South Africa, New Public Management reforms have yielded mixed results. Some government departments have achieved improvements in efficiency, accountability, and service delivery. However, challenges such as entrenched bureaucratic practices, limited institutional capacity, and political interference, along with the lingering legacy of apartheid, have impeded consistent and widespread success.

Traditional public administration values (public interest, service, honesty, integrity, fairness, equity) merge with corporate culture values (innovation, creativity, continuous improvement) to foster customer-focused service. Although portrayed as a dichotomy between bureaucracy and post-bureaucracy, the change is a continuum, with reorganisation producing significant, sometimes costly, efficiency impacts (Monteiro & Adler 2021:441; Budd 2007:539). The old Weberian bureaucratic model remains robust and sustainable. It has been supplemented by neo-Weberian components such as performance management, user participation, responsiveness,

and professional management. New public governance initiatives also play a role (Molobela & Uwizeyimana 2023:331; Christensen 2012:7; Clegg 2011:224; Kira & Forslin 2008:85). Modern government uses networks, partnerships, and collegial bodies to coordinate activities. Multi-level governance involves collaboration across different government levels. These new structures supplement the traditional state hierarchy. Their effects are debated. Some scholars find them flexible and effective. Others see increased conflicts and ambiguity. The hybrid structures combine features of Weberian, NPM, and post-NPM models. They offer both promise and significant challenges in meeting public goals.

Nonetheless, administration and communication are deeply intertwined, with effective communication at the heart of organisational management. Public organisations require strategic internal communication measures to manage administrative functions, minimise barriers in service delivery, and ultimately enhance overall organisational output (Bourne & Bourne 2022:199). Effective communication is vital for coordinating internal operations, implementing policies, and ensuring transparency. It enables clear directives among staff, supports decision-making, and fosters accountability, which are all essential for efficient public service delivery and building trust with stakeholders.

3.4 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION WITHIN COMMUNICATIVELY CONSTITUTED PUBLIC ORGANISATIONS

The previous section critically examined public administration literature, focusing on the complex structural features of public organisations and their implications for organisational administration. It was argued that despite the various reform movements, the basic features of bureaucratic organisation persist in public sector organisations, particularly in developing countries. Building on these arguments related to the influence of the institutional background as well as the elements of organisational structure and bureaucratic administration on internal communication, this section focuses specifically on communication in the organisation. Firstly, to frame communication within the context of public organisations, an exposition of the communicative constitution of organisations (CCO) is then set forth, before delving into the specifics of internal communication, particularly within public organisations, followed by the multidimensional construct of communication satisfaction.

Within this context, CCO literature provides insight into elements of the communicatively constituted public organisation, emphasising that contextual communication plays an important role in the creation and maintenance of organisations (Miller 2015:90; White, Vanc & Stafford

2010:21; Putnam et al. 2009:2; Petit, Goris & Vaught 1997:86; Downs & Hazen 1977:63). Communication satisfaction literature, in turn, focuses on the aspects of internal communication that influence employees' perceptions and experiences of organisational communication quality. The CCO perspective, therefore, creates a communicative link between the institutional environment and the individual organisation, providing a basis for understanding how communication practices shape communication satisfaction within public organisations.

3.4.1 The communicative constitution of organisations (CCO)

Miller (2015:15), Pugh and Hickson (2007:7), as well as Strati (2000:105) emphasise that communication plays an important role in the creation, replication, and maintenance of organisations. It is this observation that provided the impetus for organisational communication thinkers to acknowledge the constitutive nature of communication and advance a stance known as the communicative constitution of organisations (CCO) (McPhee, Myers & Iverson 2025:39; Miller 2015:83; Putnam et al. 2009:5). While "initial research in organizational communication treated organizations as objects, reified identities, or containers in which messages were sent up and down channels through superior-subordinate interactions and internal communication networks [all sic]," the CCO approach maintains that organisations come into being through existing communication frameworks (Putnam et al., 2009:5).

Adding to this view, McPhee and Zaug (2000:10) contend that, "Organizations exist in human societies that are already organized, that already have institutional ways of maintaining order, [and] that already have ways of communicating about all these practices [all sic]." Notably, the complexities of the macro environment influence inter- and intra-organisational communication strategies and processes, as communication constitutes organisations, just as organisations constitute communication; a reflection that justifies the inclusion of a theoretical discussion of the communicative constitution of organisations in this chapter (McPhee et al. 2025:41; Schoeneborn et al. 2014:287). This perspective also puts forward a framework that bridges the macro-micro divide in organisational communication studies, a view that aligns with a multilevel analysis suggested at the outset of this study and explains how communication processes constitute public organisations that are similar in structure, design, and functioning.

Eisenberg and Riley's (2001:294) assertion that organisational culture is constituted via communication that flows from various institutions complements the preceding viewpoint. They add that the study of organisational communication can thus be approached by understanding institutional communication processes as "organizational culture consists solely of patterns of

human action and its recursive behaviors (including talk and its symbolic residues) and meaning [all sic]" (Eisenberg and Riley 2001:294). Returning to the role of communication in constituting administrative bureaucracies, of importance here is the notion of institutional rhetoric in perpetuating a culture of formalisation and impersonal administration, and the relevance of McPhee and Zaug's (2000) four flows of organisational communication model, which explains how public organisations are communicatively constituted. These notions create a conceptual link between NIT, public administration, and organisational communication literature for the study of communication satisfaction in public organisations, as will become apparent in the arguments that follow.

3.4.2 The association between institutional rhetoric and organisational culture in administrative bureaucracies

Rhetoric generally refers to the strategic use of language, via texts, speech, and communication activities, to influence organisational behaviours (Suddaby & Greenwood 2005:39). When coupled with the term "institution", rhetoric becomes a means to fulfil institutional requisites and institute the logics associated with administrative bureaucracies within the local government organisation (Kauppi 2022:331; Suddaby & Greenwood 2005:41). As such, the forthcoming arguments create a platform of reasoning that explains the tendencies towards impersonal administration and interaction within bureaucratically structured entities.

In light of this, Alvesson (1993:1007) points to the central role of rhetoric in immortalising rational myths and preserving institutions. Alvesson's (1993) view of institutional rhetoric as an institutional myth aligns with Meyer and Rowan's (1977) description of the rational myth that manifests in the bureaucratic organisation of public utilities (Monteiro & Adler 2021:456; Green & Li 2011:1663; Alvesson 1993:1003). Just as institutionalised ideals and practices tend to be implemented ceremoniously within the organisation, organisational texts and employees' communicative behaviours become symbols of institutionally endorsed policies, norms, and prerequisites for rational functioning (Kauppi 2022:331; Green & Li 2011:1664; Alvesson 1993:1004).

Formality, routine, structure, and impersonal administration summarise the core framework of the institutional logics of public organisations (Kauppi 2022:329; Cakir 2012:8; Frederickson et al. 2012:79). These logics are carried to the organisation via institutional messages, such as texts, language, and communicative behaviours, so as to establish and sustain institutions (Lammers

2011:154). This dynamic and interactive process refers to the "institutional rhetoric" of administrative bureaucracies, within the framework of this study.

Language, via texts, speech, and other communicative behaviours, as the mode of institutional rhetoric aligns with Lammers' (2011) concept of the "institutional message" and his discussion of "bureaucratese" as the rhetoric of bureaucracies (Brummans et al. 2014:175; Lammers 2011:156). While Lammers' (2011) conceptualisation of bureaucratese represents the rhetoric of public organisations, Green and Li's (2011) notion of "rhetors" describes employees within these entities. Rhetors are the key players in effecting institutional rhetoric and "actively construct perceptions of reputation, prestige, and expertise within a field in order to construct and share institutionalized myths within and across organizational boundaries" (Green & Li 2011:1663). Nonetheless, in line with the arguments about agency and the strategic use of communication in administrative bureaucracies in the literature presented thus far, theories of institutional rhetoric also account for the element of agency.

Just as Green and Li (2011) acknowledge the notion of agency in institutional rhetoric, Alvesson (1993) too does not disregard the notion "of agency as embodied in rhetoric, or the strategic use of language [and communication] in institutional life", despite emphasising the central role of rhetoric in perpetuating institutional myths (Green & Li 2011:1663). This supposition aligns with the argument put forward previously that the management styles and communication patterns enacted within hierarchically organised institutions are dependent on the strategic implementation of these processes by superiors in key positions in the hierarchy, even though the structure and policies of the public organisation are fixed (Kauppi 2022:3331; Lammers 2011:157; McPhee & Iverson 2009:78; Boxembaum & Jonsson 2008:79; Aiken et al. 1980:632). Rhetors, therefore, can enact the role of actors or agents in transmitting institutional logics.

From the arguments put forward so far, it can be deduced that within the context of this study, institutional rhetoric refers to language usage, via organisational texts and employees' communicative behaviours, that perpetuate and give meaning to the institutionalised logic of the rational myth within administrative bureaucracies (Barker 2013:88; Bauer & Erdogan 2009:694; Eisenberg & Riley 2001:295). Defined in this way, institutional rhetoric provides an explanation for the persistence of an impersonal, formal organisational culture within administrative bureaucracies. By implication, therefore, it can be deduced that, apart from organisational structure, language, norms, and communication behaviours are important determinants of organisational culture.

Related to the central role of language, in the form of texts and past practices, Eisenberg and Riley (2001:293) identify the constitutive role of communication in creating an organisation's culture. Delineated in this way, the link between organisational culture and institutional rhetoric is clearly associated with language and normative practices (Kuhn 2012:545). This would entail a textual approach to organisational culture involving a perusal of written texts such as mission statements, and organisational and institutional policies, as well as insight into normative communicative behaviours, such as superior-subordinate relationships, leadership styles, and views on authority, innovation, process, procedure, and standardisation (Kauppi 2022:325; Bauer & Erdogan 2009:690; Eisenberg & Riley 2001:299; Hodge & Anthony 1991:444). Having determined the link between institutional rhetoric and the organisation's culture, the subsequent section outlines the relevance of McPhee and Zaug's (2000) four flows in understanding how these institutional messages infiltrate the organisation and assist in constituting its dominant culture.

3.4.3 The four flows of organisational communication

In line with the CCO approach, McPhee and Zaug (2000) developed the four flows model that explicates the interrelations between different types of communication processes that facilitate the establishment of organisations (Miller 2015:89). Through their conceptualisation of the four flows of organisational communication, McPhee and Zaug (2000) "argue that we can understand the communicative constitution of organization by appreciating the types of communication flows that happen during the process of organizing [sic]" (Miller 2015:90).

McPhee and Zaug's (2000:6) model suggest four interdependent communication processes that constitute an organisation:

- institutional positioning flow,
- self-structuring flow,
- membership negotiation flow, and
- activity co-ordination flow.

These communication processes "link the organization to its members (membership negotiation), to itself (self-structuring), to the environment (institutional positioning); the fourth is used to adapt interdependent activity to specific work situations and problems (activity coordination)" (McPhee & Zaug 2000:6). It is argued, within the framework of this study, that these flows of communication signify the institutional rhetoric of public organisations that aids in constituting its dominant organisational culture (Eisenberg & Riley 2001:293). Institutional messages are thus pertinent in

understanding information flows, which is another element in the assessment of communication satisfaction, within institutionalised settings and how these influence employees' actions and interactions.

Figure 3.3 graphically presents the notion of institutional rhetoric and the four flows of communication in constituting a public organisation, and how this is linked to a multilevel analysis of communication satisfaction as proposed at the beginning of this study.

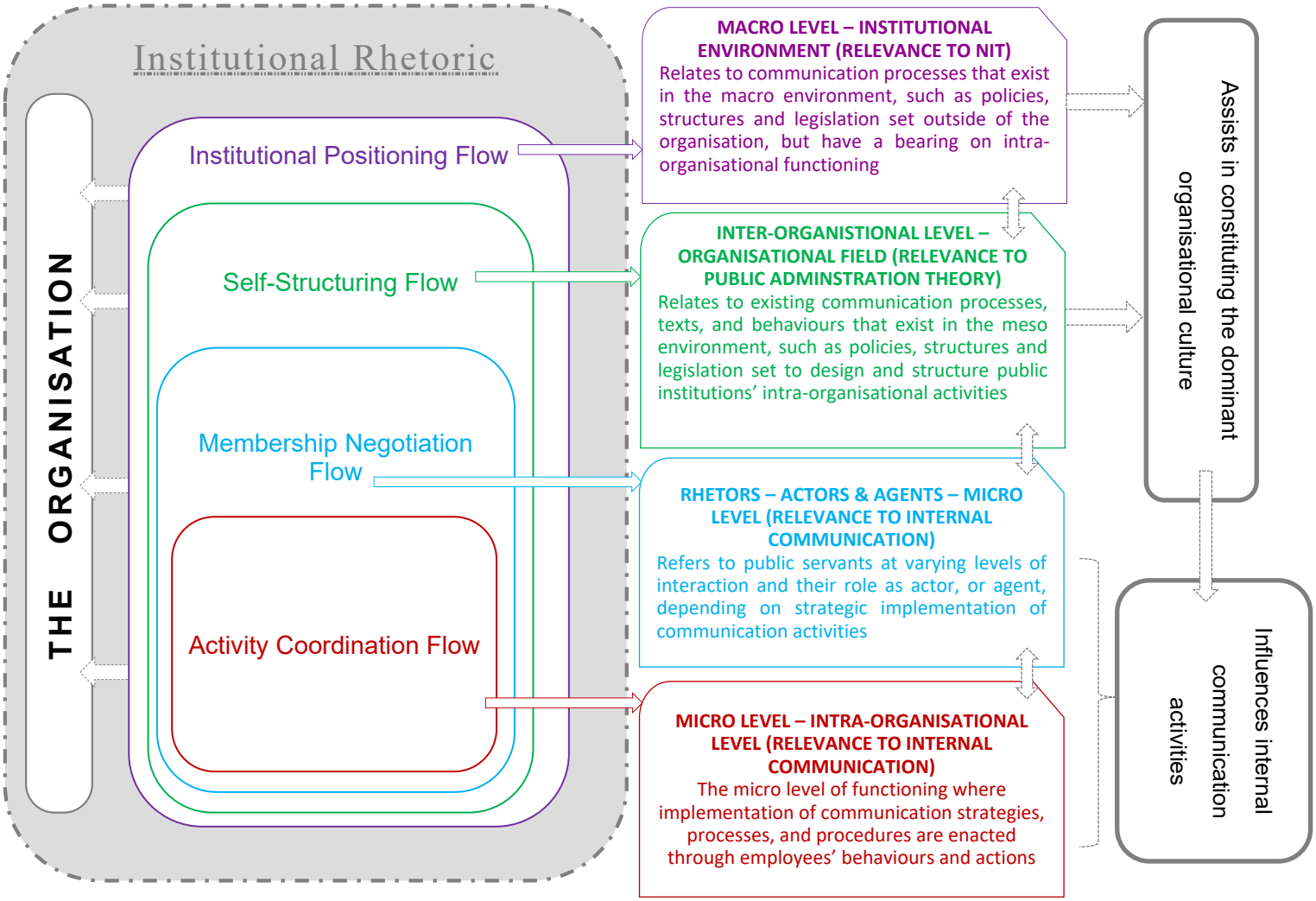


Figure 3.3: Institutional rhetoric and the interdependent four flows of communication in a public organisation – the role of communication in a multilevel analysis of communication satisfaction

Based on and inspired by McPhee's and Zaug's (2000) delineation and Miller's (2015:94) adaptation.

McPhee and Zaug (2000) identify institutional positioning, self-structuring, membership negotiation, and activity coordination, as the interdependent four flows of communication, that influence each other and in sum constitute an organisation (McPhee et al. 2025:60; Brummans et al. 2014:174; Miller 2015:92). McPhee and Zaug (2000:10) assert in this regard, "All these flows are required, [as] a constituted organization [sic] is not just a set of flows, but a complex relationship between them." They acknowledge the role of the individual's agency in coordinating activities and deny the functionalist assumptions that the notion of the communicative constitution of organisations generally engenders but contend "that a more limited version of functionalism is unavoidable or at least useful in discussing the topic of the persistence of organizations and societies of organizations [all sic]" (McPhee & Zaug 2000:5). Although they discuss the four flows in a different order, for the purposes of this study, the institutional positioning flow will be discussed first as it provides an analysis of the institutional backdrop of local government organisations and its influence on inter-organisational communication.

Institutional positioning considers the influence of the wider environment on coordinated activities, planned roles, structure and communication processes within the organisation (McPhee et al. 2025:132; Canary & McPhee 2011:311; McPhee & Zaug 2000:9; Strati 2000:110). As such, institutional positioning accounts for interactions and "processes [that] exist at the macro level of inter-organisational communication" (Miller 2015:93). This communication process outlines the interaction between the macro environment and public organisations at the inter- and intra-organisational level (Miller 2015:93). With reference to local government organisations, this would refer to the regulative and normative messages that guide the structure, design, and activities of organisations within this sector.

The institutional positioning flow explains how communication processes foster the persistence of bureaucratic organisational forms amongst public sector organisations, as expounded on in DiMaggio and Powell's (1983:158) seminal essay, discussed in preceding chapters. These messages could be in the form of policies, legislation and similar texts that are valuable in establishing the image of legitimacy, rationality and institutional integrity (or simply acceptance), which McPhee and Zaug (2000:9) refer to as 'identity positioning' within the inter-organisational public sector environment (McPhee et al. 2025:132; Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott 2008:309; McPhee & Zaug 2000; Meyer & Rowan 1977:340; Terry 2003:58). Policies such as the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998, the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000, and others guide the structure and processes of local government organisations in South Africa.

These institutional requirements of structure and policy enactment are carried out to maintain an identity of legitimacy and uphold institutional integrity, which often denotes a rational myth. As discussed earlier, despite the growing disapproval of the bureaucratic organisation of government entities and the call for a more flexible organisational structure, the nature and functioning of public organisations are dependent thereon to uphold legitimacy (institutional integrity) and to position themselves favourably within the institutional landscape.

While the institutional positioning flow provides an analysis of the messages that flow from the macro environment, the "self-structuring flow" refers to the role of communication in promoting isomorphic trends in public sector organisational design and functioning (McPhee et al. 2025:85; Miller 2015:91; Brummans et al. 2014:174). Communication within this flow would entail organisation charts, policies and procedures, directives, and feedback systems, amongst other organisational communication means (Miller 2015:91; Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott 2008:309; McPhee & Zaug 2000). Self-structuring flow "provides norms, standards, and rules for getting work done in organizations [sic]" (Miller 2015:91). McPhee and Zaug (2000:7) add, "It is unique in that it does not directly concern work, but rather the internal relations, norms, and social entities that are the skeleton for connection, flexing, and shaping work processes, and also involves processes that design the organization [sic], the setting up of subsystems, hierarchical relationships and structural information-processing systems."

Communication processes become "self-structuring" or reproduced from previous common organisational forms (bureaucracies, by implication) legitimated by the institutional environment of the public organisational domain (McPhee et al. 2025:58; Frederickson et al. 2012:111; McPhee & Zaug 2000:8; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:148; Meyer & Rowan 1977:340). Many policies, practices, and legislative frameworks are simply carried through and continued in practice for decades, sometimes with amendments or revisions, but seldom completely overhauled due to the extensive processes that go into developing these regulative structures (Brummans et al. 2014:174; Frederickson et al. 2012:109). In other words, "the formal structures expressed in these messages create, maintain, and reinforce the concentration of control and direction in an organisation" (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott 2008:309). These observations account for the isomorphic trends evident amongst administrative bureaucracies and can be related to constituting the dominant culture therein, and these communication processes manifest within the organisation by virtue of the engagement of its members, which McPhee and Zaug (2000) refer to as "membership negotiation flow".

Membership negotiation flow refers to the communication processes involved in commissioning employees within the organisation, whereby new members are "incorporated into the routines and structures of the organisation," and emphasises the relationship building between the employee and the organisation (McPhee et al. 2025:67; McPhee & Zaug 2000:7). This is an important observation that highlights the important role of employees in the constitution of an organisation and supports the argument of working on improving the communication satisfaction of employees to ensure their engagement to the organisation. Although McPhee and Zaug (2000:8) pay particular attention to the role of employees upon entry into the organisation in their seminal article, it can be argued that this process is not only relevant when appointing new organisational members but can also be an ongoing process when trying to ensure organisational commitment. This view focuses on relationship formation and maintenance, and highlights "the role of human agency in constituting organizations through the actions of organizational agents and stakeholders [all sic]" (Putnam et al. 2009:10). McPhee (2015:490) also acknowledges the role of human agency as enacted during the strategic decision-making process and strategic implementation of policies and procedures in his later work. The role of organisational members in implementing these requisites involves the coordination of various communication activities within the organisation, which McPhee and Zaug (2000:8) label "activity coordination".

Activity coordination takes place "as a result of the organization's [sic] self-structuring, which creates a division of labour, a standard task-flow sequence, and a series of policies and plans for work" (McPhee et al. 2025:116; McPhee and Zaug 2000:8). Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott (2008:309) explain that the relational aspects are just as important as work-related messages in activity coordination, and should not be overlooked (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott 2008:309). The continuous interaction of employees in executing organisational tasks and activities requires coordination and strategic implementation. Policies and procedures "self-structure" activities to a certain extent, but activity coordination comes into play in the case of non-routine activities that require human agency or 'adjustment' (McPhee et al. 2025:116; Miller 2015:92; Putnam et al. 2009:11; McPhee & Zaug 2000:9). According to McPhee and Zaug (2000:9), "the process of adjusting the work processes and solving immediate practical problems requires the sort of communication called activity coordination."

This supposition aligns with the notion of a parallel duality in public organisations and complements the argument that administrative bureaucracies can present elements of mechanical organising, but they are not necessarily entirely mechanistic systems (Monteiro & Adler 2021:441; Byrkjeflot & du Gay 2012:94; Suddaby 2011:157; Boxembaum & Jonsson 2008:79; Terry 2003:59; Aiken et al. 1980:636). The cumulative discussions thus far emphasise

the assertion that although the structure and policies of the public organisation are fixed (self-structuring flow), the management styles and communication patterns (activity co-ordination flow) adopted within hierarchically organised institutions are dependent on the strategic implementation of these processes by superiors in key positions in the hierarchy.

3.4.4 Internal communication and public organisations

Efficient and effective internal communication strengthens the relationship between an organisation and its employees (Eads 2025; Coric & Vokic 2009:88; Karanges, Beatson, Johnston & Lings 2014:333). Purposeful internal communication thus provides a way for organisational administrators to cultivate a satisfied and motivated workforce that has the potential of fostering proficiency in local government's mandate to provide efficient and effective basic services to its residents (Eliadis 2020; Nicotera 2020:37; Karanges et al. 2014:332; David 2011:75; Gillis 2011:209; Tumbare 2009:4; Welch & Jackson 2007:185; Rhee 2004:14; Baker 2002:35). While the previous focus of internal communication studies was predominantly directed by effective information dissemination, the competitive global marketplace necessitates a comprehensive internal communication strategy that encapsulates effective information sharing and the creation of an environment of strong collaboration with all organisational stakeholders, as applicable to the focus of this study (Nagar 2025; Miller 2015:30; Angelopulo & Thomson 2013:17; D'Aprix 2011:267; Whitworth, 2011:206; Wright 2009:113; Welch & Jackson 2007:178; Strati 2000:53). Therefore, internal communication is approached as a construct with various overlapping elements in the literature that provides a holistic approach to building an effective relationship with its internal stakeholders (Jaafari, Amin, Latif & Bin Ajjaj 2023:4; Williams 2011; Welch & Jackson 2007:179; Downs & Hazen 1977).

Be that as it may, one also needs to be cognisant that the concept of internal communication has evolved as researchers have uncovered many vital elements, in addition to organisational culture, climate and relationship management that constitute effective employee communications (Nagar 2025; Mishra et al. 2014:188; D'Aprix 2011:266; Wright 2009:113). As such, developing a climate of open communication and collaborative relationships between superiors and subordinates within an organisation, coupled with an effective multi-directional flow of task-related messages creates a foundation for effective employee communications (Jaafari et al. 2023:5; Eliadis 2020; Mishra et al. 2014:188; van der Walt 2013:125). Hence, an organisational culture that establishes an environment where open lines of communication are encouraged, in addition to ensuring an effective flow of important information, sets the tone for communication satisfaction amongst employees of an organisation.

Advancing this multifaceted view of internal communication, Vercic, Sinčić and Vokic (2021:561) and Gbadamosi (2003:274) point out that internal communication ought to focus on cultivating employee satisfaction to ensure employees' commitment to the organisation and its goals. Gbadamosi's (2003:275) findings provide an analysis of employees' need for meaningful work relationships amidst an effective transmission of clear informational messages. He identifies internal communication as a process of developing relationships of trust and mutual respect between managers and employees against the wider backdrop of organisational objectives. While his research is limited to studies done in Nigerian organisations, he categorises these findings as universal trends in employees' behaviour in relation to the internal communication processes of an organisation (Gbadamosi 2003:280). Pamula and Zalewska-Turzynska (2023:34), Vercic et al (2021:562), White et al. (2010:3), and Walt (2006:56) also support the view that internal communications consist of a balanced strategy of relationship-building and adequate information dissemination and emphasise the need for effective internal communications in organisations. Building supportive communication networks and creating a platform for open discussion is the key to providing adequate information to internal audiences. Nonetheless, the contention in their viewpoint relates to what constitutes "information adequacy" in pursuit of successful internal communication.

Jaafari et al. (2023:3) and Rhee (2004:63) provide a slightly different conception of effective internal communication, describing the said phenomenon as an assimilation of internal marketing and branding, internal public relations and relationship management practices to enhance employees' job satisfaction and organisational commitment. The building blocks of effective internal communications include internal marketing and public relations, superior-subordinate relationship management, organisational culture and climate, communication networks, and effective information dissemination. What can be gathered from these arguments is that employees form an important functional link in the organisational system and organisations need to adopt a holistic approach to establishing employees' commitment and engagement to the organisation, which is vital to optimum job performance and subsequent organisational success. This means that organisations need to build and maintain ongoing relationships with their internal stakeholders, which will ensure an eventual long-term relationship with external audiences. Consequently, the focus on creating meaningful working relationships within the organisation is an important aspect of contemporary internal communication studies. For this reason, establishing collaborative relationships between staff and management is just as vital as ensuring that employees are well-informed about organisational processes and task-related issues. This dual-faceted stance on improving employee satisfaction would complement the South African

National government's renewed focus on trying to revitalise the ailing service delivery of its municipalities. However, in order to understand how internal communication is approached within the public organisation, it is important to understand the role of the human resources department therein.

Internal communication can be associated with the communication processes in administrative bureaucracies (Veloso et al. 2015:14; MacLeod & Clarke 2009:52; Rhee, 2004:68). To explain, Wright (2009:113), aptly points out that while internal communication is frequently misconstrued as simply "the exchange of information" within an organisation, and usually pays scant attention to the intellectual and emotional constituents involved in the organisational communication process that are vital in ensuring employees' commitment, all too often, internal communication is confused with human resource (HR) management. Mishra et al. (2014:184) and Neher (1997: 90) expand on this to highlight that the HR function is traditionally associated with the art of *managing* an organisations' 'human capital' by emphasising human relationships and communication within the organisation, but is still strongly contingent on hierarchical lines of commands and managerial influence typical of a bureaucratic culture. Similarly, Rhee (2004:68) asserts that organisations usually depend on the human resources (HR) department as the hub of employee communication, which lacks the expertise of developing a conducive environment for open communication for their internal publics. This trend is more evident in public sector organisations.

Accordingly, MacLeod and Clark (2009:114) discuss the distinction between HR practices and internal communication within private and public organisations in the United Kingdom. HR practices often refer to the administrative functions related to "managing the human capital in the company that is often not people-centered", and they claim that the term 'human capital' itself objectifies employees (MacLeod & Clarke 2009:114). Thus, many organisations fail to create an effective internal communication climate, as they assign the role of establishing employee engagement to the HR department, whereas the communication department is allocated the task of fulfilling the marketing and public relations functions that focus specifically on external stakeholders (Mishra et al. 2014:184; Rhee 2004:10). MacLeod and Clark (2009:34) make specific note of this trend in service-orientated public organisations. Despite the results of various research studies (see Pirrotta, Ferrari, Cantarelli & Belle 2024; Welch 2015; Ruck 2016; Karanges et al. 2014; D'Aprix 2011) suggesting the positive correlation between employee engagement and organisational output in the public sector, these organisations continue displaying complacency in their service delivery as there is generally a high demand for public

sector services, which lack differentiation and competition in the market (Ruck 2016:37; MacLeod & Clarke 2009:34).

Hence, they disregard the need to utilise employee engagement practices. Although Macleod and Clark's (2009) study mainly focuses on public organisations in the United Kingdom (UK), the trends they uncover have significance in the South African context as reported by Mafini and Pooe (2013) in their study of South African public organisations. The latter (2013:2) agree that internal communication does not receive the attention it deserves in South African public organisations, as the focus of organisational research centres on the socio-economic aspects of performance, overlooking the importance of employees' attitudes and behaviours in organisational performance.

Hence, it can be stated that internal communication is approached as a concept with various overlapping elements that provide a holistic approach to understanding how internal audiences perceive communication within the organisation (Eads 2025; Williams 2011:273; Welch & Jackson 2007:179; Downs & Hazen 1977:73). The question remains as to how these changes influence the communication processes within an administrative bureaucracy in the 21st century. In response to this, Pirrotta et al. (2024:2), Miller (2024:21), Miller (2015:15), Pugh and Hickson (2007:7) and Strati (2000:105) contend that, although modern approaches to viewing organisations have evolved, the essential components of classical and human relations approaches are evident in contemporary organisations and their associated communication processes.

Having discussed the relevance of the communicative constitution of organisations within the framework of this study, and the internal communication approach that public organisations generally adopt, a specific discussion of what constitutes communication satisfaction follows.

3.5 COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION

Communication satisfaction literature points out that the pursuit for optimal organisational performance cannot be achieved without fostering an enabling environment for internal communication satisfaction (Pirrotta et al. 2024:4; Rafferty & Griffin 2009:197; Ehlers 2003:4). In this light, it would be important to understand the notion of communication satisfaction, specifically within the context of public organisations. Therefore, the following discussion explores the concept of communication satisfaction in an effort to delineate the main constructs of communication satisfaction applicable to this study.

Employees are one of the most important stakeholders of an organisation as they "are the organization's production force, which directly contributes to organizational performance [all sic]" and at the same time, they are the corporate face of the organisation through their direct and indirect interaction with external publics (Sasse 2016:11; Men 2014:264; Kettl & Fesler 2009:66). Therefore, cultivating positive organisation-employee collaborations is the cornerstone of an optimally functioning organisation (Men 2014:265). Job design, and task coordination and specialisation have always been the key elements of efficient performance and productivity that have been adopted from the scientific management approach (Sasse 2016:11; Kettl & Fesler 2009:66).

Working conditions could affect the motivation, morale, and productivity of workers, and the association between human behaviour, authority and hierarchy was sought, thus acknowledging that happy or 'satisfied' workers are more productive. Interpersonal relations in the workplace featured high in the generation of employee job satisfaction, once it was established that workplace satisfaction was not simply a matter of monetary and promotional rewards (Nagar 2025; Sasse 2016:11; Kettl & Fesler 2009:66). The role of employee motivation and job satisfaction through effective communication thus gained momentum during the relational era, which emphasised the role of organisational culture and climate in enhancing corporate performance (Pirotta et al. 2024:5; Disher 2013:18; Neher 1997:85; Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers 2003:167).

It would be too simplistic to discuss communication satisfaction as a generic concept in all organisations as internal communication activities and assessment depend on the organisational structure of the enterprise (Jung & Kim 2014:621; Christensen et al. 2007:29). Aligned with the research aims of the current study, a recap of the main arguments related to communication systems in public organisations posed thus far is firstly presented to position the subsequent discussion within the overall theoretical framework. To begin, an important argument in this thesis states that hierarchically organised organisational structures usually practice bureaucratic communication systems that emphasise vertical communication and formal lines of command and control (Pirotta et al. 2024:5; Juholin 2006:20). Government organisations are traditionally established along the lines of these rigid bureaucratic structures and traditionally inflexible organisational structures that could likely obstruct effective internal communication practices and hamper employees' communication satisfaction if these processes become routinised and begin to reflect the organisational culture of the administration (Bente 2013:1714). Communication processes within bureaucratically structured organisations is, for the most part, authoritative,

centralised, and favour pre-fixed norms and communication processes, which McPhee et al (2025:132) refer to as a form of "self-structuring", a term closely linked to isomorphism in NIT literature.

These prefixed norms would include official policies and procedures, and "involve processes that design the organization [sic], the setting up of subsystems, hierarchical relationships, and structural information-processing arrangements" (McPhee & Zaug 2000:8). By intimation, the organisation's structure influences communication processes within an organisation, which can resultantly affect employees' communication satisfaction. Subsequently, poor communication satisfaction amongst employees could lead to a dwindling sense of engagement in the organisation, waning job performance and reduced organisational output (Pirotta et al. 2024:12; Canary & McPhee 2011:2; MacLeod & Clarke 2009:135; Pandey & Garnett 2006:40; Verwey & du Plooy-Cilliers 2003:26). It can therefore be deduced that the characteristics of classical organisation that continue in practice have a bearing on the organisational culture, climate, and ultimately communication satisfaction within administrative bureaucracies as they impress upon impersonal relationships, routinisation of activities, and focus on organisational goals above individual proclivities.

In light of this argument, it has been observed that local government organisations usually pay insufficient attention to the communication satisfaction needs of their employees, as councils consider maintaining political and public accountability as their primary function and fail to appreciate the role of their internal stakeholders in fulfilling their mandate of service delivery and institutional integrity (Pirotta et al. 2024:3; Mafini & Pooe 2013:1; Fletcher 1999:45). Pertaining to the South African government's objective to create a favourable image of municipalities, there is a need to improve internal communication structures first, because employees must feel that they contribute to the overall success of the organisation (Herman 2018; Holeni 2018; Brand 2018; Boyd & Sutherland 2006:10). Hence, municipalities need to establish employees' loyalty to the wider organisational goal of service delivery by establishing sound internal communication structures to ensure the optimal communication satisfaction of employees, which will improve employees' job performance (Pirotta et al. 2024:12; Boyd & Sutherland 2006:11). Considering the importance of employees' communication satisfaction in ensuring organisational health, the subsequent discussion outlines the definitions and facets of communication satisfaction.

Jaafari et al. (2022:10) and White et al. (2010:8) agree that communication satisfaction deals with various aspects of employees' communication experiences within the organisation, their contention, however, is with the provision of adequate information. There needs to be a balance

struck between too much information and too little information, where too much information is not necessarily better communication. They further argue that a distinction needs to be drawn between information and communication. In their extensive qualitative study, they identified that employees desire more value-laden, face-to-face interaction with their superiors on a formal level during meetings, and on an informal level within an interpersonal context. Thus, employees want first-hand communication with their superiors. On the other hand, employees view information as the amount of impersonal data they receive via e-mail, the company website, or printed memoranda and newsletters. Employees consistently require relevant information and need to discuss pertinent issues with senior management on an interpersonal level. In other words, managers need to be visible to their employees and must interact collaboratively with them in addition to providing impersonal operational information. In consensus, Juholin (2006:21) encourages management to find a balance between information overload and lack of information on the information dissemination continuum. She emphasises the need for more face-to-face communication between management and employees in pursuit of establishing mutual trust and understanding, where increased trust leads to an open flow of communication and stimulates participative decision-making.

To add to that argument, Pirotta et al. (2024:12) and Boyd and Sutherland (2006:12) emphasise the importance of satisfaction in determining employees' commitment to the organisation. The key findings of their studies reveal that adequate internal communication structures positively impact on employees' perception of the organisation. Employees are the face of the organisation, they argue, and their levels of communication satisfaction create its public face. Therefore, creating an organisational culture of two-way communication and appropriate feedback mechanisms proves important to engage employees with the organisation and ascertain satisfaction. Consequently, communication satisfaction is an important concept that encompasses the employee's need for information and interactive communication. These issues are pertinent to communication satisfaction, as increased information dissemination does not necessarily lead to improved communications. Essentially, an environment that is conducive to participative interaction in the workplace across all levels of functionality enhances internal communication satisfaction and positively affects job performance.

As has been established, internal communication is one of the key determinants of employee motivation and engagement, job satisfaction, job performance and ultimately overall organisational health (Jaafari et al. 2023:10; David 2011:75; Gillis 2011:209; Rhee 2004:14; Hargie & Tourish 2009:9; Baker 2002:35; Clampitt & Downs 1993). Among the factors contributing to job satisfaction, communication between employees and senior management, and

the relationship with the immediate supervisor rank highly (Mishra et al. 2014:184; D'Aprix 2011:258; Bauer 2004:4). Pettit et al. (1997) also contend that communication is a key component in employees' satisfaction with their job. Their study, conducted in two manufacturing firms, revealed that aspects of communication such as the accuracy of the information disseminated in the organisation coupled with employees' perception of their supervisor's communication style, influences an employee's work performance. Communication satisfaction thus is positively correlated with overall job satisfaction and productivity.

Organisations ought to provide a strategic mix of vertical and horizontal communication that displays greater organisational integration are likely to increase the job satisfaction and productivity of their employees (Hines 2014; Ramirez 2012:3; Chen 2008:168; Dickson et al. 2008:130; Miller 2006:41; Walt 2006:iv; Bauer 2004:13; Ehlers 2003:3; Littlejohn 2002:288; Petit et al. 1997:81; Clampitt & Girard 1993:86; Downs & Hazen 1977:63). Creating a climate of participative decision-making for employees at various levels in the workplace is one way of increasing horizontal communication that can positively influence total job satisfaction. Moreover, communication has both task and relational dimensions, and there is a strong association between job satisfaction and the leadership style of superiors that includes both task and relational behaviour. Therefore, in addition to improving information adequacy, promoting better understanding and collaboration among employees determines levels of work satisfaction.

Pirotta et al. (2024:2) and Pandey and Garnett (2006:44) also highlight how communication performance is overlooked in the analysis of public sector performance, even though the association between good communication and optimum organisational output is evident. They claim that establishing "clear and effective channels of communication" fosters an environment for enhanced organisational performance Added to this, DeHart-Davis et al. (2014:849) assert that public employees' dependence on formal rules to execute their jobs has a potential bearing on employee morale and job satisfaction. They explain that the level of formalisation of rules is reflective of the organisational structure and culture, "thereby altering the normative workplace experiences of public employees." From all these arguments, it can be reasoned that organisational culture is linked to climate and communication satisfaction, has the potential to enhance organisational performance and employee satisfaction, and serves as a control mechanism to channel conduct towards desired behaviours and to prevent undesired behaviours (Veloso et al. 2015:2; Welch 2015:28; Kim & Park 2014:64; Schneider et al. 2013:373; Harris & Nelson 2008:12; O'Donnell & Boyle 2008:4; Geldenhuys 2006:24; De Ridder 2004:22). Therefore, what can be deduced from these arguments is that organisational members who are

satisfied with the level of internal communication provided, tend to feel more inclined towards job satisfaction and produce a higher quality of work.

According to Downs and Hazen (1977:64), organisational researchers' interest in finding the link between job performance and communication led to the construct of communication satisfaction, which they claim was initially defined as "a unidimensional, generalized [sic] feeling which an employee has toward his total communication environment". Upon further investigation, it became apparent that the construct of communication satisfaction has several elements, which cover both the relational and functional aspects of communication (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Meintjes & Steyn 2006:156; Clampitt & Girard 1987:3; Downs & Hazen 1977:64). In this light, after intensive study, Downs and Hazen (1977) identified eight elements of communication satisfaction that cover relational and functional aspects. The delineation of these dimensions of communication led to the development of the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ) which has been soundly tested for reliability and validity and has been recognised and utilised by other researchers (Sharma 2015:53; Varona 1996:3; Clampitt & Girard 1993:8; Clampitt & Downs 1987:5).

Communication satisfaction is often considered the "sum" of an individual's satisfaction with these dimensions. These factors include communication climate, horizontal and informal communication, subordinate communication, organisational (corporate) perspective, media quality, organisational integration, superior communication, and personal feedback. Identifying the level of communication satisfaction of public service employees from this stance can provide an overview of the general levels of fulfilment with their communication experiences, as well as an indication of contentment with each of the eight factors delineated in the CSQ. This would give an indication of the perceptions of employees to the relational and functional aspects of communication satisfaction within an administrative bureaucracy, which can be assessed in relation to the structure, design and culture of an as has been argued thus far. A brief discussion of the dimensions measuring communication satisfaction in the CSQ appears hereunder, followed by an outline of the constructs, linked concepts, and theoretical statements for this study.

3.5.1 Communication climate

While communication culture describes the communication structure of the organisation, climate describes how employees feel about their communication experiences within their work environment, which can vary between departments and units (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Schneider et al. 2013:380; Eisenberg & Riley 2001:307; Neher 1997:93). Hunt and Ivergard (2007:30) claim

that, “Organizational climate is both influenced by organizational culture and also shapes organizational culture - these two concepts thus appear to be ‘reciprocally related’[all sic].” Additionally, communication climate is strongly correlated to job satisfaction and productivity, which signifies this dimension as one of the strongest elements of communication satisfaction (Downs 1988:130).

Verwey and Du Plooy-Cilliers (2003:166) describe communication climate “as the subjectively experienced quality of an organisation’s internal environment, which is determined by the perceptions that organisational members hold about communication activities, events, and behaviour within the organisation.” Neher (1997:91) adds, “Climate is a relatively enduring quality of the internal environment of an organization [SIC] that is experienced by its members and influences their behaviour.” Apart from individual and group perceptions of the working environment, structure is also regarded as an important aspect of workplace climate (Hunt & Ivergard 2007:30; Pandey & Garnett 2006:40). In sum, the relationship between subordinates and their direct managers, the size of the organisation, structure, and the nature of the work carried out by employees are important aspects of communication climate (Sharma 2015:53; Eunson 2008:26; Hunt & Ivergard 2007:30; Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers 2003:167; Neher 1997:94).

Pandey and Garnett (2006:40) add that aspects of climate, such as trust, openness, and morale tend to have a negative statistical relationship with bureaucratic organisational cultures. This could come from the fact that larger organisations, typical within the public sector, are usually more structured and formalised and tend to portray an impersonal, detached communication climate (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Hunt & Ivergard 2007:30; Pandey & Garnett 2006:40). Moreover, Mishra et al. (2014:184), and Rhee (2004:10) point out that many organisations fail to create an effective internal communication climate as they assign the role of establishing employee engagement to the HR department, whereas the communication department is allocated the task of fulfilling the marketing and public relations functions that focus specifically on external stakeholders.

Regardless of the structure or design of the organisation, efforts should be in place to ascertain employee engagement and satisfaction through developing an open and supportive communication climate, because of the implications this has on productivity and organisational output (Men 2014:267; Schneider et al. 2013:365; Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers 2003:166; Neher 1997:98).

3.5.2 Horizontal and Informal Communication

This dimension focuses on lateral communication, or the communication between employees at the same level of the organisational hierarchy, and the extent to which information therein is accurate and free-flowing (Downs 1988:113). Horizontal communication includes formal and informal communication (Eunson 2008:558). The formal aspect of horizontal communication probes the roles of tasks, work units, and divisions (Frederickson et al. 2012:109; Berkley & Rouse 2009:206). The objective of formal horizontal communication is to allow for interdepartmental cooperation and integration, to facilitate organisational efficacy, and includes items about problem-solving, teamwork, and communication (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Sharma 2015:53; Eunson 2008:558; Sutherland & Canwell 1997:64). Although similar channels of communication are utilised for horizontal and vertical communication, face-to-face approaches prove to be more effective for horizontal communication (Fielding 2006:54). Interdepartmental rivalry, unwillingness to share information across departments, lack of motivation and incentives for efficient lateral communication, and interdepartmental differentiation could create barriers for effective horizontal communication.

This factor also includes satisfaction with the activeness of the grapevine or informal communication between employees (Sharma 2015:53). Informal communication is neither facilitated nor advocated by the organisation, and can include office gossip, organisational and work-related information, and information related to organisational climate and change (Jones 2010:163). Employees become more actively engaged in informal communication networks when they deem formal means of communication as inadequate, thereby promoting grapevine communication (Fielding 2006:55). Although informal communication can travel via various mediums, the predominant channel of communication for grapevine communication is word-of-mouth, which enhances the speed of information travelling along this communication network (Sharma 2015:53; Fielding 2006:55).

Horizontal communication is overlooked and sometimes even discouraged in hierarchically organised organisations in an intended effort to improve productivity (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Jones 2010:163; Farmer 2008:53; Verwey & du Plooy-Cilliers 2003:26) . This view perpetuates the notion of a rational myth that curtailing informal and interdepartmental communication leads to unfulfilled social needs, which would affect employee satisfaction and, by implication, performance as well. However, while horizontal communication might be discouraged in some bureaucratic organisations, it cannot be completely stopped because the informal organisation can enhance organisational performance as employees use the informal channels of

communication to disseminate not only company gossip, but important organisational information that cements their identification with the organisation.

3.5.3 Subordinate communication

This dimension deals with how supervisors feel about the overall communication with their subordinates therefore only supervisors respond to items in this category (Downs 1988:113). This dimension considers communication overload, how responsive subordinates are to downward communication, and subordinates' inclination to initiate upward communication, as these elements would provide a platform for determining the communication satisfaction of superiors (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Sharma 2015:53). Frederickson et al. (2012:109) and Neher (1997:160) point out that bureaucracies rely predominantly on downward information channels to transmit work-related information, such as policies, directives, and so on, to employees.

Downward information flows from the top tiers of the organisational chart, such as government executives for instance, to public employees at the lower levels of the organisational structure, and could be transmitted via various media, depending on the organisational preferences and communication strategy of the entity (Frederickson et al. 2012:109; Berkley & Rouse 2009:206; Fielding 2006:52). Employees expect information from the top tiers of the organisation to be reliable, sufficient, functional and timely in order to meet their specific job requirements successfully (Fielding 2012:52). Information overload, insufficient or inaccurate information are common problems with downward communication that need to be considered in the organisation's strategic plan for internal communication (White et al. 2010: 20).

However, in order to build relationships with employees, upward communication is a necessity, therefore, this dimension also investigates employees' willingness to initiate upward communication (Downs 1988:113). Upward communication is a form of formal communication that flows from the lower levels of the organisational chart to the top tiers of the hierarchy, such as from subordinates to management or from middle management to top management for instance, and provides an important feedback mechanism for downward communication (Fielding 2006:53).

Various channels of communication could be utilised for upward communication, depending on the communication strategy of the organisation, in order to gain significant awareness of subordinates' perceptions and understanding of their working environment and to give employees a voice and enhance their perception of being part of the organisation and the

decisions being made therein (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Eunson 2008:558). The efficacy of upward communication is established when employees feel that management has recognised their opinions without a sense of being prejudiced or subject to physical or psychological intimidation, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging to the organisation (Engin & Akgoz 2013:111).

3.5.4 Superior communication

While the previous dimension assessed superiors' satisfaction with their subordinates, superior communication assessed subordinates' satisfaction with the communication with their managers (Downs 1988:113). Being able to communicate effectively with subordinates is an important indicator of good leadership skills among supervisors (Jones 2010:162). Therefore, the superior-communication dimension assesses the extent to which superiors are open to ideas that subordinates put forward and their willingness to listen and pay attention to employees under their supervision (Downs 1988:113). The extent to which supervisors offer guidance to their employees in solving job-related problems is also considered in this dimension (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Sharma 2015:53; Downs 1988:113). As with the previous dimension discussed in this section, the upward and downward flow of communication that travels via various channels in the organisation is of importance in the assessment of this element of communication satisfaction (Sharma 2015:53).

Subordinates experience improved levels of communication satisfaction when they feel that their managers acknowledge their communication efforts. The inclination to initiate upward indication diminishes when subordinates feel that managers ignore their suggestions or are unwilling to listen to constructive criticism, reducing trust in the superior-subordinate relationship thereby creating a platform for information distortion (Jaafari et al. 2023:13; Fielding 2006:53). Berkley and Rouse (2009:216) argue that upward communication is riddled with problems within hierarchically organised administrations, as "the first role requirement of executives and supervisors is to direct, coordinate, and control the activities of persons below them." Therefore, information travelling along the hierarchical line of command is viewed as a control mechanism thereby discouraging employees from initiating upward communication out of fear of reprisal (Berkley & Rouse 2009:216). When considering the link between institutional messages and the study of bureaucratic organisations, with a particular focus on government organisations, Lammers (2011:160) highlights the notion of 'bureaucratese'. Bureaucratese is the formal, impersonal, and authoritative nature of some institutional messages within bureaucracies that create a power distance between superiors and subordinates, which denotes a preference for

impersonal superior-subordinate relationships. The analysis of superior-subordinate relationships is an important element of the communication satisfaction construct.

3.5.5 Personal feedback

Related to the previous two dimensions, personal feedback is a factor that contains questions about superiors' understanding of problems faced on the job and whether or not employees feel the criteria by which they are judged are clear (Jaafari et al. 2023:13; Eunson 2008:326). Feedback is also a two-way process, working from management to employees and vice-versa. This communication response system creates agreeable work relationships that will direct employee development initiatives (Sharma 2015:53; Gbadamosi 2003:8). According to Favero et al. (2014:6), “Employees need to receive feedback from managers concerning how well they are contributing to key organisational goals so that they can thereby learn to perform their jobs better and also to focus more on goals that are important to the organisation” Creating a culture of two-way communication involves both formal and informal communication and provides an opportunity for collaboration between superiors and subordinates at all levels of the organisation (Men 2014:265; Mishra et al. 2014:187).

3.5.6 Organisational (corporate) perspective

Aligned with the personal feedback dimension discussed in the preceding section, the organisational perspective dimension focuses on the dissemination of information about the organisation in general, encompassing organisational policies, goals, financial position, and performance level and includes knowledge of government policies affecting organisational functioning (Sharma 2015:53; Downs 1988:113). Employees should be well-informed about the organisation’s goals and objectives and understand them well enough to be able to align their jobs with the overall mission of the organisation (Jaafari et al. 2023:13; Sharma 2015:46; Hunt & Ivergard 2007:31; Sempane, Rieger & Roodt 2002:28).

The corporate/organisational perspective dimension deals with the broadest kinds of information about the organisation as a whole and refers to the information given out concerning the corporation and its goals and performance. It also encompasses knowledge about external events, such as new government policies that affect the organisation. To align their performance with organisational goals, they need information on key organisational objectives, as well as the organisation’s performance in relation to these goals. In terms of the focus of this study, this entails, for example, the Municipal Structures Act (No. 117 of 1998), and the Municipal Systems

Act (No. 32 of 2000) which form the basis Integrated Development Plan (IDP) that drive organisational and individual performance in municipalities in South Africa.

3.5.7 Organisational integration

While the organisational perspective dimension concerns organisational information, the organisational integration dimension revolves around the amount of information individuals receive about their direct working environment (Downs 1988:113). Employees' knowledge and skills about both their jobs and the organisation provide them with the opportunity to become organisational advocates with the clients, who in turn can enhance the organisation's reputation (Jaafari et al. 2023:13; D'Aprix 2011:258; Mishra et al. 2014:184). Items in the organisational integration factor include the degree of satisfaction with information about departmental plans, the requirements of their job and related items, such as policies and benefits, as well as information about current events, and departmental and personnel news. Information about such matters makes employees feel they have been integrated and engaged with the organisation (Hargie & Tourish 2009:7).

Of importance in the assessment of communication satisfaction is the influence of too much communication and too little communication (Sharma 2015:43). Organisational communicators need to assess the strengths and weaknesses of different channels of communication to attain communication adequacy and prevent the issues of overload and underload of communication, which affects employees' communication satisfaction (Jaafari et al. 2023:13; Sharma 2015:53; Crescenzo 2011:220). The fact that Information is disseminated via informal and formal routes aggravates the issue of communication adequacy. Therefore, organisational communicators need to distinguish between "*what employees must know* (task-related information), *what they ought to know* (essential but desirable organisational information, e.g., changes in senior management), and *what they could know* (relatively unimportant office gossip), all of which makes the task of effective communication within organisations even more challenging" (Kitchen & Daly 2002:50).

3.5.8 Media quality

The media quality dimension examines the usefulness, quality, and quantity of information received from communication sources, such as publications, memoranda, and meetings, through numerous channels (Jaafari et al. 2023:14; Sharma 2015:53; Downs 1988:113). Selecting the optimal internal communication approach rests on the expectations and beliefs of employees as

on the potential efficiency of message delivery. While email is highly convenient for both sender and receiver, particularly in tall hierarchies, it is an impersonal medium and lacks the richness of other information sources which could also pose the possibility of information overload (White et al. 2010:20).

Email is most useful for announcements to communicate the same thing to many people, to keep employees informed about an issue and to reach geographically dispersed employees (Fielding 2009:52). When compared with other formal mediums such as e-mail or print, face-to-face communication is considered the richest communication channel, as it facilitates nonverbal communication thereby providing affective cues in messages that are not particularly evident in other forms of communication (Sharma 2015:43; White et al. 2010:7). Therefore, communicators in organisations need to develop a strategic mix of various media formats and channels for effective internal communication that would establish information and communication adequacy.

What follows is an outline of the constructs, linked concepts and theoretical statements for this study, leading to the theoretical model proposed. In line with the arguments in this section, the researcher delineates three main constructs that embody the arguments presented in the theoretical chapter, namely,

- institutional positioning,
- constituted organisational culture, and
- communication satisfaction

The delineation of and link between constructs is depicted in Figure 3.4 below.

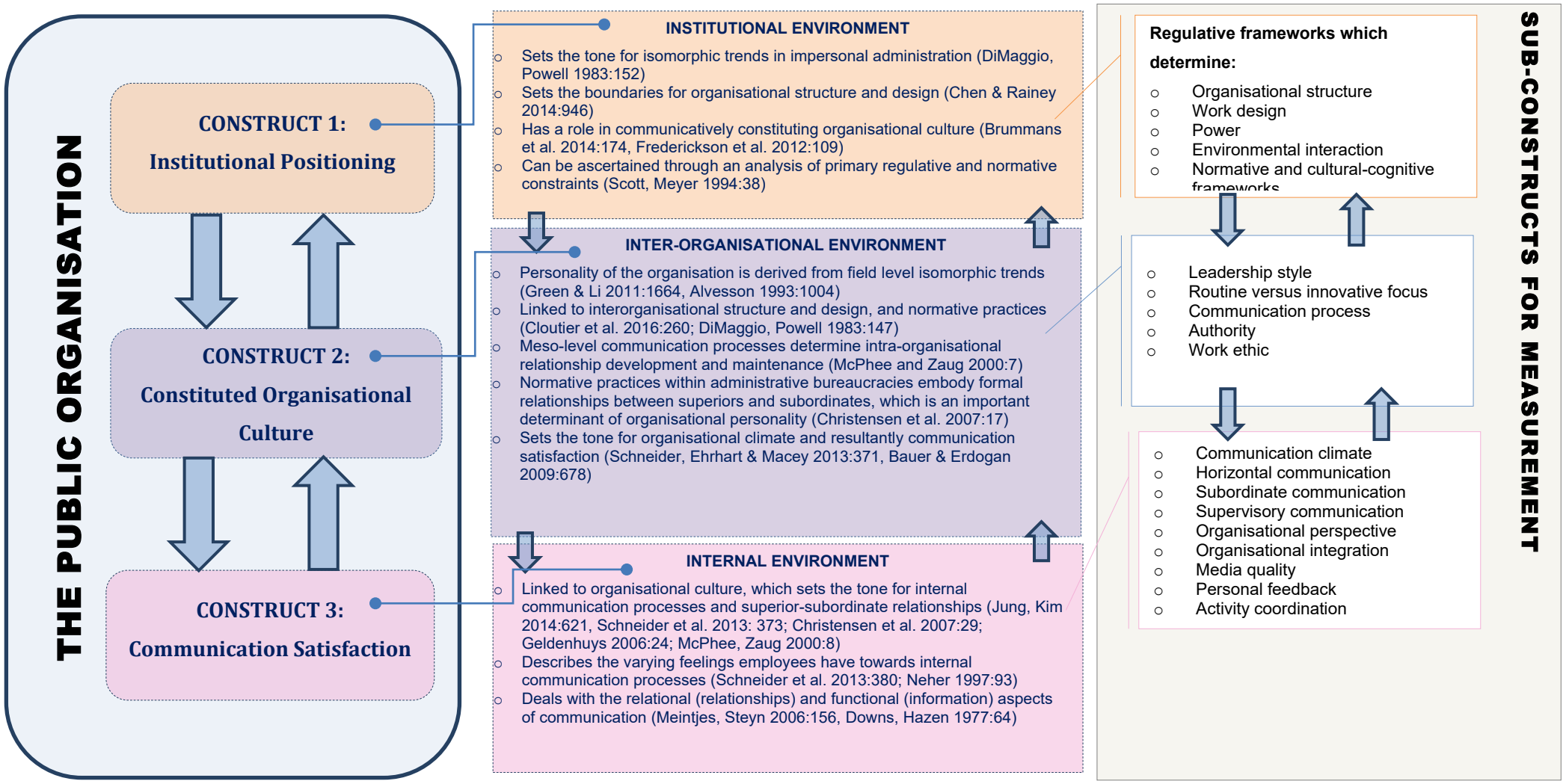


Figure 3.4: Delimitation of and the link between constructs related to the study of communication satisfaction in public institutions
Source: Developed by Ashiya Osman (2026), based on neo-institutional theory (NIT), public administration, the communicative constitution of organisations (CCO), and communication satisfaction literature

3.6 SUMMARY

The literature review chapter focused on establishing a multilevel analysis of communication satisfaction within public institutions, which entailed a perusal of literature from three fields, neo-institutional theory (NIT), public administration, and organisational communication. In so doing, a sequential process of theoretical analysis ensued, to frame the intra-organisational functioning of administrative bureaucracies against the institutional backdrop of the public sector. The point put forward was, that although NIT provides an overall framework for understanding institutional forces a perusal of public administration and organisational communication literature would provide details into the specific characteristics of public sector organisations and intra-organisational communication processes, respectively. Together, the three interrelated fields of organisation research presented a holistic approach to analysing internal communication satisfaction within local government organisations. To achieve this aim, NIT has been employed as a meta-theoretical framework of analysis to understand the institutional forces that shape and constitute public organisations isomorphically.

The next step of theory development in this sequence explicated the particular characteristics of administrative bureaucracies, as observed at the field or inter-organisational level that detailed how isomorphic forces present themselves within this sector on a functional level. This exploration focused specifically on organisational structure, design, and elements of impersonal administration. What was established in the final segment of this chapter was that the macro and meso environments affect internal communication satisfaction. This supposition was established using the communicative constitution of organisations (CCO) perspective, which highlighted the role of institutional rhetoric and the four flows of organisational communication in constituting the organisation's dominant culture. Throughout the discussions put forward, organisational members' agency in the strategic implementation of institutional requisites has been emphasised, despite constraining institutional forces. A discussion of the communication satisfaction construct, as applicable to local government organisations, against the backdrop of a constituted organisational culture provided the culmination of the literature review and proceeds to the empirical and methodological analysis, which is highlighted in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH PARADIGM, DESIGN, AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

While Chapter 2 contextualised South African local government organisations against their institutional backdrop, Chapter 3 explained the theoretical framework of this study by exploring the general literature and theoretical deliberations that steered the existing academic and practical grasp of internal communication practices within public organisations. The institutional context, organisational culture, and communication satisfaction were outlined as three associated theoretical constructs that provide a holistic understanding of internal communication within public organisations. The empirical component of the study, discussed in this chapter, is built on the theoretical underpinnings and constructs, as well as the institutional contextualisation outlined up to this juncture. This chapter, therefore, discusses the paradigmatic stance as well as the associated philosophical assumptions that guide this study and highlights the overall design strategies and methodologies utilised to gain insight into all the related facets of the research problem within the parameters of this study as outlined in Chapter 1.

This chapter considers the empirical part of this study by discussing the research design and how it has been implemented, in terms of its qualitative and quantitative segments. Consequently, the chapter begins with the universal ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological foundations of research in general, before associating these assumptions to the pragmatic-interpretivist approach adopted for this research. The ensuing segment of this chapter presents a discussion of the overall research design and methodologies used for the empirical aspect of the investigation and ends with the specific issue of ethical considerations and the particular limitations of this study.

4.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

An applicable, though dated, rendering of a paradigm is provided by Guba and Lincoln (1994:105), who succinctly define a paradigm “as the basic belief system or world view that guides the investigation, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways.” Though dated, this definition is still applicable and aligns with previous and current definitions of the term (*see* Kaushik & Walsh 2019; Kumar 2019:33; Saunders et al. 2009:128; Burrell & Morgan 1979:23). In other words, a research paradigm refers to scientists’ collective agreements about how

problems should be perceived and tackled. Research paradigms are based on some underlying, explicit or implicit, interrelated, philosophical postulations about what constitutes acceptable research and the most suitable methods for acquiring knowledge about a particular enquiry.

Ontology and epistemology are two key aspects of research philosophy that form the foundation of the understanding of the world (Kaushik & Walsh 2019; Hardy 2016:767; Scotland 2012:9; Saunders et al 2009:109; Greene & Caracelli 1997:6; Guba & Lincoln 1994:10). Ontological positioning influences the way in which a researcher approaches and addresses research problems (epistemological approach), which denotes an important relationship between ontology and epistemology (Kumar 2019:16). Outlining the ontological approach and epistemological endeavours of a research study therefore ensures a coherent link between the research design, methodology and the underlying paradigmatic stance. The social researcher is ontologically concerned with "objective" or "subjective" nature of the reality under investigation, which links with the axiological position of the researcher (Nguyen 2019:3; Scotland 2012:9; Saunders et al. 2009:112; Burrell and Morgan 1979:1).

While ontological assumptions denote the way that researchers view the nature of reality in the research process, epistemological assumptions guide the researcher in acquiring information about the problem under investigation (Bryman 2019:16; Walliman 2015:12; Burrell & Morgan 1979:2). Epistemological decisions related to what data is collected and how it is collected, which is largely based on whether the social scientist acquires knowledge through inductive or deductive reasoning. Although neither of these processes is linear, they follow a certain structure and logic in the approach to and acquisition of knowledge, as explained hereunder.

The researcher's overall approach to knowledge acquisition would be guided by an inductive method (which is inherently more exploratory and flexible) if little were known about the phenomenon in question, which indicates a preference towards qualitative research. Whereas the researcher would be guided by a deductive approach (which is more descriptive and explanatory in nature) when the researcher has some background understanding of the phenomenon under study and can make predictions about the nature of this truth, this implies an inclination towards quantitative research.

Finally, there are assumptions based on methodological orientations that commonly distinguish between qualitative and quantitative approaches, as explained above (Kaushik & Walsh 2019; Walliman 2015:33; Blaxter, Hughes & Tight 2001:60). Besides the evident differences in data

collection and analysis techniques, there is a rudimentary epistemological variation between qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Maarouf 2019:5; Walliman 2015:33; Blaxter et al. 2001:60). Nonetheless, although the methodological orientation directs the choice of research method used, researchers should not confuse the term “method” with the term “methodology”.

While the term “method” concerns the techniques of data collection such as, inter alia, surveys and interviews, the term “methodology” is more philosophically oriented, and is generally linked to the ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations of the study (Bryman 2019:155; Verhoeven 2011:17). Moreover, quantitatively approached data collection will have a different underlying objective and will generate largely distinctive data from study conducted using a qualitative stance. For instance, Bryman (2019:107), Babbie and Mouton (2003:49), and Blaxter et al. (2001:60) explain that quantitative research is concerned with empirical data presented in objective, numerical form that focuses on specific methods of data collection, such as closed-ended questionnaires, for example. Qualitative data, however, is concerned with the exploration of information in detailed subjective textual narratives using particular methods such as, inter alia, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. These methodological differences can be viewed as polarisations and should not be considered as mutually exclusive distinctions even though they provide practical guidelines for research in the social sciences (Maarouf 2019:2; Walliman 2015:33; Blaxter et al. 2001:60). Social science research does not always accede to all of the requirments of the paradigmatic determinism that underly purely qualitative or quantitative approaches, and many studies blend the two methodologies in an effort to study various facets of a research problem more comprehensively (Kaushik & Walsh 2019; Creswell & Creswell 2018:16; Walliman 2015:33; Blaxter et al. 2001:60; Greene & Caracelli 1997:8).

The pragmatic-interpretivist perspective, adopted for the current research and discussed in the following sub-section, is one of the approaches that does not fall neatly into one of these traditional paradigmatic polarisations. The pragmatic–interpretivist paradigm explores how employees across organisational levels interpreted and navigated the post-2016 period, allowing the study to generate contextually grounded and practically relevant insights. Peterson (2010:36) acknowledges that organisational researchers, both knowingly or unknowingly, bring an orthodox outlook to their sphere of research that represents a set of assumptions about how the world is viewed and studied. Peterson’s (2010) understanding is reflected in Burrell and Morgan’s (1979:iix) conservative perspective of paradigms that is based on these mutually exclusive polarisations. Although these conservative views still hold ground in current research discourse, there are counter arguments in

this respect, as argued subsequently and supported in the approach of this study (*see* Kaushik & Walsh 2019; Timans, Wouters & Heilbron 2019; Walker & Baxter 2019; Hendren, Luo & Pandey 2018; Deetz 2014; Yanow & Ybema 2014; Saunders et al. 2009).

Unlike Burrell and Morgan (1979:25), Kaushik and Walsh (2019), Maarouf (2019:2) and Saunders et al. (2009:109) purport that the practical considerations of the study at hand influence the researcher's philosophical approach. The practical reality of research is that a particular research question rarely falls neatly into only one philosophical domain, and would require a more flexible, "pragmatic" approach in selecting the research approach and adopting the methods used to collect data. In this light, as Glogowska (2011:252) puts it, "pragmatists have argued that the rigid dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative research is a false one and have proceeded to loosen the connection between methods and methodological stances". Bryman (2016:625) adds, "The connection between research strategy on the one hand, and epistemological and ontological commitments, on the other, is not deterministic." Simply put, Kaushik and Walsh (2019), Goldkuhl (2012:141), Hellmann (2009:641) opine that the research approach chosen depends on the research question the researcher seeks to answer, while at the same time being able to reflect upon and support philosophical preferences. Timans et al. (2019:205), Hardy (2016:766), Duemer and Zebidi (2009:165) and Guba and Lincoln (1994:105) provide a similar view and affirm that both qualitative and quantitative methods may be used appropriately within a single research paradigm, as questions of methodology are secondary to the paradigmatic approach adopted, thereby bridging the gap between theoretical and practical epistemology, which would entail a pragmatic approach.

4.2.1 The pragmatic-interpretivist paradigm

Maarouf (2019:3), Lorino (2018:6), David and Bitektine (2014:167), Deetz (2014:33), Suddaby and Greenwood (2014:188), Yanow and Ybema (2014:51) and Wicks and Freeman (1998:129) chronicle the move towards combining methods and integrating paradigms in understanding the complexities of organisational life. As such, the shift towards paradigmatic and methodological pluralism provides greater breadth and depth of analysis and insight of the organisation as a social construction of multiple perspectives. Given that the data were collected during a period of organisational and political disruption in the municipality, pragmatism is particularly appropriate, as it prioritises practical, context-responsive insights that account for the instability shaping employees' experiences. Against this framework of paradigmatic pluralism, the present study employs a pragmatic-interpretivist approach to addressing the research problem. The ontological approach of

this study is interpretivist, while the epistemological approach is pragmatic. In other words, this study proposes pragmatism as an epistemological framework to underlie the combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies in answering the research questions with a view to understand the communication experiences of public employees more comprehensively. As a starting point, Figure 6.2 below presents the philosophical assumptions of the pragmatic-interpretivist approach. A systematic discussion of the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological frameworks that underpin the research philosophy steering this study follows the graphic depiction thereof.

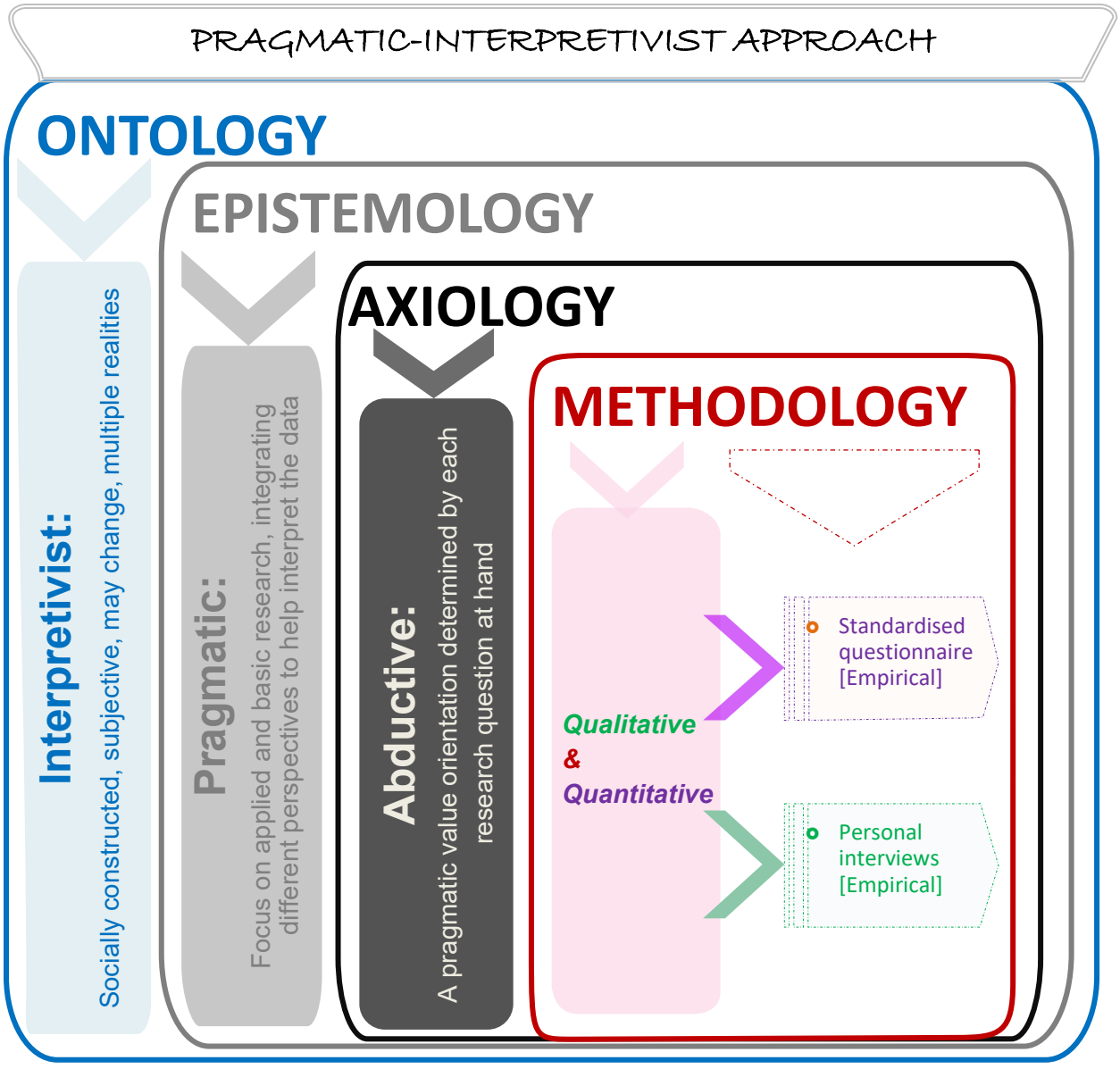


Figure 4. 1: The philosophical assumptions of the pragmatic-interpretivist paradigm deployed in this study
[Inspired by the delineations put forth by Saunders et al. (2009:119)]

According to the interpretivist ontological position, it is important for the researcher as a social actor to appreciate differences between people, therefore reality is viewed as a social construction with multiple meanings (Nel 2019, Mishra et al. 2014:185, Yanow & Ybema 2014:45; Terre Blanche et al. 2008:275; Babbie & Mouton 2003:29). As interpretivism integrates human interest into a study, emphasis is placed on the subjective experience of individuals as social actors and the interpretation of information that may be gathered through numerous methods (Miller 2015:102; Peterson 2010:40; Du Plooy 2009:21; Saunders et al. 2009:116). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019:148) and Yanow and Ybema (2014:45) argue that approaching organisational research from an interpretivist ontological perspective provides an account of the complexities of organisational behaviour in a rapidly changing global marketplace. In other words, the basic assumption of the interpretivist ontological stance, as applicable to this study, is that reality is multi-fold, subjective, internal, and understood from the fundamental meanings employees attach to communication to explain organisational life. Based on this assumption, the present study employs an interpretivist ontological stance and views reality as understood from employees' perceptions of their communication experiences within a specific social context, namely, a public organisation in the local government sphere in South Africa.

In applying a pragmatic epistemological framework, emphasis is placed on the research questions and choosing the most appropriate methodological approach for answering particular research questions (Kaushik & Walsh 2019; Goldkuhl 2012:141; Bryman 2011:525; Duemer & Zebidi 2009:165; Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009:85). In other words, pragmatism focuses on outcomes and the most suitable approach to address the research problem; and integrates multiple stances, including subjective and objective perspectives (Maarouf 2019; Van Griensven, Moore & Hall 2014:370; Creswell & Plano Clark 2011:42). Pragmatism is gradually being acknowledged as a philosophical position for research, particularly studies that utilise various methods to gather, present and analyse data, and make logical inferences and construct theories, thereby integrating inductive and deductive approaches, in what is known as abductive reasoning to address the research problem (Kaushik & Walsh 2019; Maarouf 2019; Saunders et al. 2019:116; Lorino 2018;196; Saunders et al. 2012:12; Duemer & Zebidi 2009:165; Onwuegbuzie & Leech 2005:2). "Abductive reasoning" integrates the logistical strengths of both inductive and deductive reasoning. This allows for a more balanced analysis that mitigates the limitations of a single-method approach, ultimately facilitating the most robust conclusion based on the collected municipal data (Kaushik & Walsh 2019; Moscoso 2019:317; Lorino 2018:214; Mitchell 2018:105). Thus, researchers who adopt a pragmatic stance can be involved in generating data and developing theories in a single study. Consequently,

abduction allows for the most plausible explanation for the current research problem, grounded firmly in empirical data and theoretical underpinnings. From a pragmatic epistemological stance, researchers therefore have the liberty to choose methods and can use different approaches for collecting and analysing data to address the research questions coherently and holistically to facilitate informed, pragmatic decision-making in organisations that enhance strategic planning and further research undertakings in this respect.

With reference to methodological orientation, this study employs qualitative and quantitative methodologies, utilising individual interviews and printed questionnaires for the empirical study that is theoretically, conceptually and contextually underpinned by a multi-layered review of germane literature, and an analysis of relevant policy documents to address the research questions. The conceptual and theoretical groundwork of this study has already been established in previous chapters, while this chapter particularly focuses on the methodological orientation thereof. The combination of approaches takes place at several stages of the research process, from identification of research questions, through sampling and selection of participants, data collection, analyses, and interpretation of the data, as highlighted by Kaushik and Walsh (2019), Weathington, Cunningham and Pittenger (2010:527) and Tashakkori and Teddlie (2008:117). In this way, the research questions determine what approaches are used in the various steps of the research process, as well as the axiological position involved at each stage of the process to gain a holistic understanding of the research problem.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGIES

The underlying philosophical assumptions of a given study lead to the research design and methodological orientation. The research design was shaped by the organisational conditions of the post-2016 period, which, as outlined in Chapter 1, was marked by political and administrative disruption. This study employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to address all the elements of the research problem. The combination of methodologies provides broader insight into the research problem as each approach answers different research questions in varying depth (Creswell & Creswell 2018:62; Schoonenboom & Johnson 2017:110). Where the quantitative research provides insight into the various dimensions of communication satisfaction across the municipality, the qualitative data provides insight into the contextual environment of public organisations. In this way, the combination of approaches provides a more comprehensive overview of the research problem at hand.

The research design followed a process of concurrent, yet separate, data collection for the qualitative and quantitative strands of this study, where the two sets of data (interview and questionnaire data) were collected at the same time, but they were kept distinct. The analysis of data was also carried out concurrently, but independently. In other words, the analysis of qualitative data commenced once all the interviews were transcribed, and the analysis of quantitative data commenced as soon as all the survey data were captured. Following the two sets of distinct analyses (i.e., the qualitative thematic analysis and quantitative statistical analyses), the data were systematically combined in the presentation and interpretation of findings to provide a combined analysis. In other words, the qualitative findings provided in-depth explanations of the different aspects of the phenomena observed in the quantitative results to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Conducting the study during the post-2016 period allowed the findings to reflect employees' experiences within that particular organisational context.

Kaushik and Walsh (2019), Creswell and Plano Clark (2011:43), Weathington et al. (2010:525) and Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007:123) assert that the pragmatic combination of elements of both methodologies considers multiple perspectives, positions and opinions, thereby increasing the scope and depth of understanding of the research problem. In this light, Weathington et al. (2010:526) argue that, while "quantitative research is designed to empirically identify the presence and magnitude of differences between individuals and/or groups of individuals, qualitative research tends to focus more on rich description of a phenomenon than on its quantification", and "often bring[s] a new or fresh perspective to existing research in fields that have been dominated by quantitative methods". Creswell (2018:60) further asserts that the research questions steer the choice of methodologies and methods utilised to address the research problem holistically when adopting a pragmatic position. Thus, as this study adopts a pragmatic epistemological stance, the research questions addressed the contextual, theoretical and conceptual, and empirical facets of the problem, using the research strategy that worked best to answer each research question and provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem.

In doing so, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used to address the research questions holistically. It is important to note that the development of the contextual, theoretical and conceptual frameworks is important in progressing to the empirical segment of the study. The research questions, which are broken down into sub-questions, also progress from the theoretical, conceptual and contextual aspects to the empirical component of the research. The overall

discussion and presentation of the research strategies utilised to address the contextual, theoretical and conceptual, and the empirical components of this study were provided in Chapter 1, with particular focus on each element of the design in varying chapters. As such, this chapter only provides a detailed account of the research strategies employed to address the empirical component of the study. In this sub-section, the overall research problem of this study is followed by an overview of the research design and methodologies. A detailed outline of the research goals, aims, questions and sub-problems for the overall study is presented in Chapter 1 and will not be duplicated in this chapter. Therefore, this chapter then provides a detailed discussion of the overall population of the study. The delineation of the population moves the discussion towards the distinct sub-sections of the qualitative and quantitative segments of the study in terms of sampling, research methods, data analysis and elements of sound research practice, in sections 4.3.3 and 4.3.4, respectively.

4.3.1 The research problem

Bwisa (2018) and Walliman (2006:71) state that, once the research problem and focus have been determined, the method, approach and time dimension of the investigation need to be established and presented as a research statement. Hence, the succinct description of the research problem outlined for this study can be stated as follows:

The study employs a pragmatic-interpretive approach in this cross-sectional study, using both qualitative and quantitative means to explore and describe the communication experiences of the employees at the *eThekwini Municipality.* This is done from a neo-institutional theory (NIT) perspective to understand what bearing the institutional environment has on the internal communication methods, strategy and practices of the *eThekwini Municipality,* and ultimately on employees' levels of communication satisfaction within the organisation.

The research statement leads to the general research question that the study intends to address (Walliman 2006:33; Babbie & Mouton 2003:75). The general research question for this study can be outlined as follows:

Through contextual, theoretical, and conceptual, as well as empirical enquiry, what insight can be gained into the bearing that forces, such as the institutional environment, have on the internal communication processes of public organisations and employees' satisfaction with the internal

communication within public organisations in general and at the *eThekwini Municipality* specifically during the post-2016 municipal election period?

4.3.2 Population of the study

The initial point of departure for any research design is the delineation of the overall study population, where the samples of research participants were drawn for both the qualitative and the quantitative segments of the empirical investigation of this study. The population for the overall study is thus discussed below. Before demarcating the population for this study, however, a distinction needs to be made between the general, target, and accessible populations before outlining the sampling techniques used in the qualitative and quantitative segments of the study to carry out the empirical work, which are discussed in detail in sections 4.3.3 and 4.3.4, respectively.

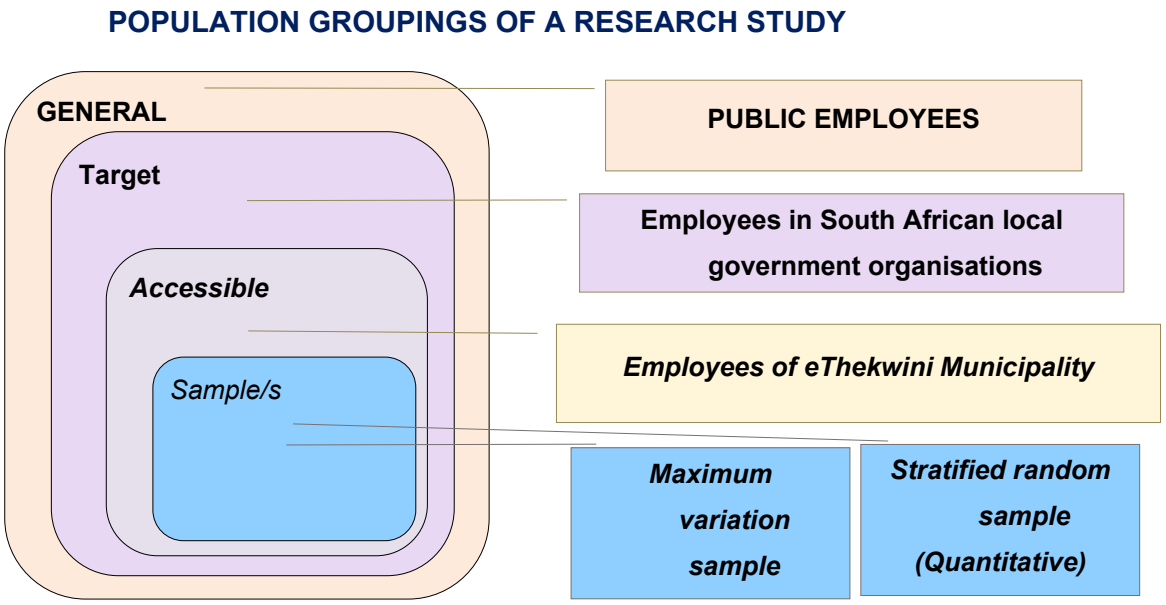


Figure 4. 2: Delineation between the general, target and accessible populations

[Adapted from the diagrammatic display of population groupings by Asiamah, Mensah and Oteng-Abayie (2017:1611)]

The largest generic set of potential participants for a given research study is the general population, which is the "embodiment of the target and accessible populations" (Asiamah, Mensah & Oteng-Abayie 2017:1611). The general population is a generic set of possible research participants that

share basic general parameters related to the research problem, which in the case of this study are public employees (Lim 2019; Babbie & Mouton 2003:173).

In most cases, just as in this study, it is practically unfeasible to assess the general population empirically, considering various constraints, such as, the size of the population, time-frame for the study, finances, context, and other practical challenges (Lim 2019; Asiamah et al. 2017:1611; Gray 2014:91). Therefore, the general population is further delineated into the target and accessible populations.

The target population is a more refined subset of the general population and refers to the entire group of individuals or items that the researcher is interested in in relation to the research goals (Swisher 2017:1). Asiamah et al. (2017:1611) and Bordens and Abbott (2014:159) identify the target population as the general set of primary elements (units of analyses) that the research focuses on more specifically, in terms of context, which in the case of this study are employees in South African local government organisations. Asiamah et al. (2017:1612), Bordens and Abbott (2014:159) and Terre Blanche et al. (2008:133) further explain that although the target population aligns more closely to the research goals in terms of context, it usually consists of a very wide cohort of units of analyses that may be unfeasible for empirical investigation, such as in the current research, and, therefore, steers the researcher towards an accessible population.

The accessible population, also known as the study population, is a representative subset of the target population with regard to characteristics, is accessible to the researcher and can be used to draw a sample, which is a small segment of the accessible population wherefrom information can be gathered to address the research problem for the empirical investigation (Lim 2019; Swisher 2017:1; Verhoeven 2011:176; Terre Blanche et al. 2008:133; Babbie & Mouton 2003:174).

This study gauged the communication satisfaction of employees in eThekwini municipality, one of the largest metropolitan municipalities in the country, after the 2016 local government elections. This election changed the political landscape of South Africa indicating a shift in power and politics in the country as the ANC hung on to its reign in eThekwini by a small margin (Xaba 2023; Ritchie 2021; Mkhabela, H. 2016). The population relevant to this empirical study comprises administrative employees of the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. To ensure the direct relevance of the data to the central research problem, the population is defined by a critical temporal parameter: only those individuals who were actively employed during the acute Political-Administrative (P-A) disruption

period (post-2016 municipal elections) were eligible for inclusion. This specific temporal delimitation ensures the data reflect the direct organisational experience of the institutional disruption under investigation.

The eThekwini Municipality, one of the country's largest metropolitan municipalities, was approached to gauge the communication satisfaction of employees situated within a disruptive institutional backdrop at this juncture, as explained in Chapter 1. A detailed discussion of the different categories of municipalities in South Africa and their significance for this study has been provided in Chapter 2. Nonetheless, the *eThekwini Municipality* granted official permission to conduct. Thus, all employees of the *eThekwini Municipality* formed part of the accessible population for this investigation, wherefrom the samples for both the qualitative and quantitative strands of the study were drawn (the sampling strategies for the qualitative and the quantitative strands of the research are systematically discussed in Sections 4.3.3 and 4.3.4, respectively).

Permission to conduct the study was granted after liaising with the Office of the City Manager (see Addendum A), and access to the nine clusters was granted via the human resources department. Nonetheless, the researcher ensured consistent contact (face-to-face, telephonic, and email communication) with various organisational structures in the municipality over the two years of the study and followed all the formal processes to gain access to the organisation for the study (refer to Addendum A for the letter of permission from the organisation and Addendum B for the ethical clearance certificate from the university's ethics board).

4.3.2.1 Population parameters

Population parameters summarise the common characteristics of the accessible population on the basis of which fairly representative samples can be drawn (Lim 2019; Swisher 2017:1; Babbie & Mouton 2003:175). For this research, the primary shared characteristic of the accessible population for both the qualitative and quantitative segments is that they had to be employees of the *eThekwini Municipality*, irrespective of age, gender, language group, etcetera. All eligible individuals must have been employed by the Municipality at any point between the 2016 local government elections and September 2017. This eligibility was essential to ensure the samples included individuals with first-hand knowledge of the political changes that preceded the institutional shock.

To ensure the representativity of participation across the municipality, the accessible population for the qualitative and quantitative elements included units of analysis from all nine clusters, which include the Office of the City Manager and the City Manager's Operations Office at the *eThekwini Municipality*:

1 Office of the City Manager
2 City Manager's Operations Office
3 Community and Emergency Services
4 Corporate and Human Resources
5 Economic Development and Planning
6 Finance
7 Governance and International Relations
8 Human Settlement, Engineering Service and Transport
9 Trading Services

It should be noted that each cluster is made up of various units of variable sizes, and the researcher sought to gain access to all units via the cluster heads for both segments of the study (qualitative and quantitative). The municipality restructures clusters and associated units according to operational needs; therefore, the cluster divisions might differ over time. The primary interest was to reach **all clusters** and to ensure that the widest possible representation of participants was achieved across the municipality for the qualitative and quantitative parts of the empirical work. Hence, the qualitative segment (enacted through personal interviews) only included managerial staff from each cluster, while the quantitative segment (collected through printed questionnaires) included staff from all levels of the municipality across clusters. In this way, a comprehensive understanding of the institutional context of public organisations in terms of its influence on internal communication practices and strategies was gained from superiors (who, ideally, have to interact with, understand and implement these regulatory procedures within the public municipality) and overall staff (who carry out these protocols and procedures in the daily operations of the municipality.

Therefore, the samples for both sets of data included strata delineated according to clusters. As discussed earlier, although the data collection and analysis were carried out concurrently (at the same point in time), the qualitative and quantitative procedures were kept separate. The following sub-sections discuss the qualitative element (Section 6.3.7) and the quantitative element (Section 6.3.8) independently, where the specific aspects of sampling, measurement tools, collection and

analysis of data and issues of sound research practice are discussed for the qualitative and quantitative segments of the empirical component of the study, respectively.

4.3.3 Qualitative element of research design

As stated previously, to gain insight into the influence of the institutional environment on internal communication processes within the municipality, this study utilised semi-structured individual interviews with a maximum variation, a non-probability sample of managerial staff for the qualitative segment of the empirical work. Terre Blanche et al. note in this regard that "[N]on-probability sampling refers to any kind of sampling where the selection of elements is not determined by the statistical principle of randomness" (2008:13). Qualitative research is based on more inductive approaches to data gathering, and usually adds more depth of understanding to research findings from the research participants' viewpoints, as it concentrates on employees' direct experiences as meaning-making agents (Crossman 2019a; Kennedy 2018:48; DeFranzo 2011; Maxwell 2005:29; Babbie & Mouton 2003:270). As qualitative research uses intensive methods for data collection and analysis, generalisability is not the objective (Crossman 2019a; Vogt et al. 2014:429; Silverman 2011:355; Verhoeven 2011:179). Therefore, small, non-probability samples can be used to gain greater insight into the research problem (Enago Academy 2019; Flick 2014:7).

Non-probability sampling is extensively used in qualitative research for the purposeful identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood 2015:533; Creswell 2013:46; Creswell & Plano Clark 2011:173; Verhoeven 2011:179; Weathington et al. 2010:205). In the case of this study, the non-probability sampling technique was based on a maximum variation sample of managers from the different clusters in the municipality, as is explained in the ensuing sub-section 4.3.3.1, in order to gain insight into managerial staff's perspectives of internal communication within the institutional context. The carefully reported steps followed in the qualitative element of this study, such as data collection and analysis procedures, research method and measurement tools, as well as the processes employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the conclusions reached, are discussed after the sub-section on sampling strategies.

4.3.3.1 Sampling, data collection and capturing procedure

To answer the research questions of this study, the qualitative strand of the empirical element comprised semi-structured one-on-one interviews with managers who met the specific temporal

eligibility (employed post-2016 elections) and had direct observational knowledge of the institutional environment, based on a maximum variation sampling technique. This immediate collection was essential because the qualitative data was designed to address the macro-level (P-A disruption) and meso-level (organisational culture) objectives. Specifically, interviews were used to collect rich, contextual data on the nature of the coercive institutional pressure and the resulting shift in administrative management and internal communication practices during the acute crisis period.

Crossman (2019c), Van Rijnsoever (2017:6), Patton (2015:252), Terre Blanche et al. (2008:290) and Bailey (1982:93) explain that maximum variation sampling is a purposeful, non-probability technique that aims to select individuals that hold variations in perspectives within the accessible population in order to understand how different people in different settings perceive and understand a phenomenon. Choosing diverse units of analyses allows the researcher to investigate the distinctiveness of each case as well as patterns in shared experiences across the variation (Stumpfegger 2017; Creswell & Plano Clark 2011:174; Suri 2011:67). When using a maximum variation sampling method, the researcher selects a small number of units or cases that maximises the diversity of participants relevant to the research question, which in the case of this study was based on a sample of employees in middle and/or top management positions across all nine clusters in the municipality.

In this way, insight was gained from the widest possible range of managers across the municipality to accumulate a variety of views of internal communication within the institutional context of South African local government organisations. This range of opinions serves the need to ‘understand’ perspectives from various managers across the municipality, which, pragmatically, was the most suitable way to answer the research questions in terms of breadth and depth of perspectives related to the institutional context of the *eThekwini Municipality* across clusters. Therefore, only employees from the top and middle management across all the clusters of the municipality were considered in the sampling frame for the qualitative segment as managers (who, ideally, have to interact with, understand, and institute these regulatory systems within the public municipality) would provide insight into the broader institutional environment and its possible bearing on the internal communication process, as discussed previously.

After liaising with the Office of the City Manager, the Human Resources Department and various cluster and unit heads, employees from top and middle management positions were purposefully chosen across clusters. Once research participants were selected, a stipulated date and time was

set up for each interview at the respective sites of the interviewees. Cassell (2011:504) states that the interview location "should be analysed as part of the overall social context of the study and be considered as having a role in both the interaction and knowledge produced." DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019:4), Ecker (2017) and Herzog (2012:212) indicate that the location of the interview does not only relate to the issue of logistics, familiar environments, and preferences of interviewees, but also of providing a space for the voices of managers from various clusters to be heard in context, all of which are important considerations in the social structuring of reality in terms of their understanding of the internal communication processes in the *eThekwini Municipality* within its institutional context. Therefore, in view of balancing the elements of logistics, participant preferences, and research context in the construction of meaningful knowledge, the interviews were held at the various locations of the interviewees' workplaces across the jurisdiction of the *eThekwini Municipality*.

In the interview setting, the researcher welcomed the interviewee, introduced herself and provided a brief background and overview of the research focus. The interviews then proceeded, with an approximate duration of 60 minutes for each scheduled interview. Interviews continued until data saturation was reached and no new information was forthcoming from subsequent participants. Once this point of saturation was reached no more interviews were conducted. Thus, by the time the twentieth interview was conducted, the point of saturation was reached as participants put forth recurrent topics with no new information coming across. Gentles, Charles, Ploeg and McKibbon (2015:1781) indicate that data saturation "refers to reaching a point of informational redundancy where additional data collection contributes little or nothing new to the study". Hamilton and Finley (2019:4), Saunders, Sim, Kingstone, Baker, Waterfield, Bartlam, Burroughs and Jinks (2018:1896) and Suri (2011:72) agree that when additional interview data delivers little in terms of atypical information, insights, themes or opinions in a qualitative research synthesis, then this would signal the point of data saturation. In other words, data collection continues until a point when similar views are continually expressed in interviews and no new information is forthcoming. Therefore, once data saturation was achieved (i.e., when N=20) and common themes and narratives continually recurred, data collection was discontinued, and no further interviews were conducted. Table 4.1. below displays the sample distribution of participants after the point of saturation was attained.

Table 4. 1: Sample distribution for the qualitative segment of the study after data saturation was reached

	CLUSTER	SAMPLE SIZE (N)
1	Office of the City Manager -	3
2	City Manager's Operations Office	2
3	Community and Emergency Services	3
4	Corporate and Human Resources	2
5	Economic Development and Planning	2
6	Finance	2
7	Governance and International Relations	2
8	Human Settlement, Engineering Service and Transport	2
9	Trading Services	2
TOTAL (N)		**20**

4.3.3.2 Research method and measurement tool

Hamilton and Finley (2019:3), Vogt et al. (2014:50), and Cassell (2011:504) highlight that, although there are different forms of interviews, such as inter alia, telephonic, digital, and textual, each of which can provide equally meaningful and rich data, face-to-face interviews, as adopted in this study, are most commonly used in organisational research. Mulder and De Bruijne (2019) and Cassell (2011:509) add that the preference for face-to-face interviews can be attributed to a lack of research and standardised guidelines on electronic forms of interviewing and an inclination towards traditional forms of interview settings that provide a platform for traditional, congenial conversations with research participants. Moreover, challenges associated with digital access, familiarity with video and audio-conferencing tools, and issues of connectivity and other technical errors that are particularly apparent in the South African context make these tools less attractive to participants (Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey & Lawless 2019:5). Hence, in view of the pragmatic feasibility of answering the research questions within the parameters cited for the preference for face-to-face interaction in the South African context, the researcher conducted semi-structured personal interviews (one-on-one) at the various premises (offices) of individual interviewees after permission was granted from the specific cluster and unit heads of the municipality.

Utilising semi-structured interviews that integrate structured and unstructured questioning styles provides a more flexible approach to interacting with participants (Stokes & Wall 2014:148; Vogt et al. 2014:49; Brewerton & Millward 2012:70; Cassell 2011:503; Qu & Dumay 2011:251). DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019:2), Stokes and Wall (2014:148), Kennedy (2006) and Mason

(2004:518) add that a basic framework in the form of an interview guide usually provides an overall framework to orient the interviews. The semi-structured guide generally includes some basic topics and broad questions that steer the conversations in line with the research goals and research questions. This is done to obtain specific and systematic data, while concomitantly probing, stimulating recall, and encouraging participants to openly express themselves within the ambits of the research focus. Therefore, the interview guide used for this research, available under Addendum C, included a mixture of semi-structured items outlined by broad topics related to the three conceptual focus areas of this study, namely institutional context, organisational culture and communication satisfaction. The flow of the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee guided the process of the interviews and the questioning style that allowed for fluidity and flexibility in participant interaction and responses while maintaining the research focus.

4.3.3.3 Data Analysis Methods

The qualitative data were transcribed and analysed from the recorded interviews, and the notes taken during the interviews were woven into the analysis. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019:7), Bryman (2016:479), Verhoeven (2011:221) and Terre Blanche et al. (2008:302) explain, in conjunction with the notes taken during the interview, the verbatim transcripts from the audio recordings enhance the credibility of the analysis through recurrent exploration and evaluation of the latent and semantic meanings ascribed to interviewees' responses. Moreover, Bryman (2016:481) and Terre Blanche et al. (2008:302) add that, although verbatim transcriptions of interview data are time-consuming, they provide a rich and detailed examination of recorded conversations that the researcher can refer to during the analysis process. At this stage of the analysis process, data are sorted and categorised according to themes in a process of data reduction usually referred to as thematic analysis (DeJonckheere & Vaughn 2019:7; Maxwell & Chmiel 2014b:21; Willig 2014:147; Saldana 2009:49; Braun & Clark 2006:83). Thematic analysis involves a process that requires iterative coding, re-coding, sorting, connecting and refining data into logical patterns in latent and semantic ways, thereby refining the categories into less abstract themes (Medelyan 2019; Li 2018; Cassell 2011:503; Silverman 2011:218; Saldana 2009:49).

Using a pragmatic approach, during the thematic analysis process the researcher arranges and reconstructs data in a manner that encapsulates the main concepts through an abductive process that involves the iterative development of categories derived from the literature and by engaging with the data to understand participants' perceptions of the phenomena under investigation (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove 2016:107; Saldana 2009:139; Ayres 2008:868). In terms of this study,

although the three overarching constructs derived from the literature study (namely, institutional positioning, constituted organisational culture, and communication satisfaction) initially guided the semi-structured interviews for this study, the flexible flow of the discussions and the final themes derived from the analysis of data sketched the eight dimensions of communication satisfaction in what embodied an abductive process of theming the data. Categories were derived by analysing words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs to identify semantic and latent understandings of the data that moved between inductive and deductive patterns of analysis.

Consequently, patterns in the data (which only became apparent during the iterative data analysis process) were identified that created links to Downs and Hazen's (1977) eight communication satisfaction dimensions, which also highlighted the bearing that institutional; positioning and constituted organisational culture had on each of these dimensions of communication satisfaction. The two tables below exhibit how the abductive process of data analysis became apparent and led to the final themes. Table 6.3 presents the initial analysis of the data guided by the theoretical statements for each of the constructs derived from the literature study, while Table 6.4 presents the themes derived after the iterative coding process.

Table 4. 2: Initial analysis guided by constructs derived from the literature study

THEMES	Theoretical statements (Description of theme)	Key terms derived from the literature	Examples from data and links to dimensions of communication satisfaction
Institutional Positioning	• Institutional positioning considers the influence of the wider (institutional) environment (which implies existing, organised practices) on predictable and coordinated activities, planned roles, structure and communication processes within the organisation, which affects organisational structure, culture, superior-subordinate relationships, and employee behaviours. These could be applied via regulations, social norms or subjective frames of reference (Frederickson et al. 2012:79; Scott 2008:57; Christensen et al. 2007:17; Waldo & Miller 2007:xi; McPhee & Zaug 2000:9). • Just as institutionalised ideals and practices tend to be implemented ceremoniously within the organisation, organisational texts and employees' communicative behaviours become symbols of institutionally endorsed policies, norms, and prerequisites for rational functioning (Frederickson et al. 2012:111; Green & Li 2011:1664; McPhee & Zaug 2000:8; Alvesson 1993:1004; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:148; Meyer & Rowan 1977:340).	• **Legitimacy** (Meyer & Rowan 1977:340) • **Institutional integrity** (Terry 2003:58) • **Identity positioning** (McPhee & Zaug 2000:9) • **"Institutional myth"** (Green & Li 2011:1664; Alvesson 1993:1003) • **Rational myths** (DiMaggio & Powell 1983:148; Meyer & Rowan 1977:340)	Labour unions - Policies do not change - but implementation is affected by labour unions Unions affect policy implementation in government – Unions can be unreasonable – Unions have become a powerful institution that affects staff morale and worker output Municipalities are at the receiving end as they engage with labour unions at the grassroots level municipal policies informed by national regulation Municipal Systems Act, Municipal Structures Act

			Policies move from national to provincial, regional and then local Local gov has some form of autonomy but most policies are informed by national policies GIS Communication Policy informs internal communication policies (it's communications for all government sectors, provincial, national and local government) Internal - working on a social media policy for instant feedback mechanism
Constituted Organisational Culture	• The infiltration of positivistic management principles in public institutions implies an isomorphic normative tendency, which indicates that the impersonal management styles in administrative bureaucracies have been adopted as the norm. (Fry & Raadschelders 2008:309; Waldo & Miller 2007:60)	• **Institutional messages** (Lammers 2011:154) • "**Bureaucratese**" (texts, language, behaviours) (Lammers 2011:157) • **Institutional logics** (Wakefield et al. 2015:354; Zilber 2012:89)	ops meeting - meeting of unit and cluster heads - every Monday – formal structure difference between gov and corporate – gov workers are the most unhappy workers – Interviewee 1 reliance on managers to cascade information due to structure of municipality and different workers levels (downward comm)

	• Institutions and communication are inextricably linked as institutions are formed and sustained through communication. The logics of administrative bureaucracies is transmitted to the organisation via institutional messages, such as texts, language, and communicative behaviours to establish and sustain institutions (Wakefield, Plowman & Curry 2015:354; Cakir 2012:8; Zilber 2012:89; Green & Li 2011:1663; Lammers 2011:154; Suddaby 2011:156; Christensen et al. 2007:21; Suddaby & Greenwood 2005:41; Jablin & Putnam 2001:286; Tausky 1978:130) • Many policies, practices, and legislative frameworks are simply carried through and continued in practice for decades, sometimes with amendments or revisions, but seldom completely overhauled due to the extensive processes that go into developing these regulative structures (Brummans et al. 2014:174; Frederickson et al. 2012:109). • Formality, routine, structure and impersonal administration summarises the core framework of the institutional logics of public institutions, which are carried to the organisation via institutional messages, such as texts, language, and communicative behaviours to establish and sustain institutions. This dynamic and interactive process becomes the institutional rhetoric of administrative bureaucracies (Cakir 2012:8; Frederickson et al. 2012:79; Lammers 2011:154).	• **Mimetic isomorphism** (Zucker 1987:446, DiMaggio & Powell 1983:151) • **Coercive isomorphism** (Pugh & Hickson 2007:166) • **Normative isomorphism** (Pugh & Hickson 2007:168) • **Institutional rhetoric** (Green & Li 2011:1663; Suddaby & Greenwood 2005:41; Jablin & Putnam 2001: 286)	

Communication Satisfaction	• Although the structure and policies of the public organisation are fixed (self-structuring flow), the management styles and communication patterns (activity co-ordination flow) adopted within hierarchically organised institutions is dependent on the strategic implementation of these processes by superiors in key positions in the hierarchy (Lammers 2011:157; McPhee & Iverson 2009:78; Boxembaum & Jonsson 2008:79; Aiken et al. 1980:632). • Whilst bureaucratic entities can present elements of mechanical organising, they are not necessarily entirely mechanistic systems that are incapable of adjusting to internal and external pressures, as has been noted in the concept of loose coupling and decoupling (Byrkjeflot & du Gay 2012:94; Aiken et al. 1980:636). • Municipalities need to establish employees' loyalty to the wider organisational goal of service delivery by establishing sound internal communication structures to ensure the optimal communication satisfaction of employees, which will improve employees' job performance (Boyd & Sutherland 2006:11).	• **Actors** (Hwang & Colyvas 2011:63) • **Agency** (Clegg 2010:9) • **Membership negotiation** (Putnam et al. 2009:10) • **Rhetors** (Green & Li 2011:1663) • **Coupling** (Frederickson et al. 2012:77; Tolbert & Zucker 1996:178; Aiken et al. 1980:632) • **Frame-breaking** (Terry 2003: 59) • **Frame-bending** (Terry 2003: 59)	Personality of managers affects upward communication COMM SATIS CASCADING ON INFO (technical challenges versus leadership issues)

	• As much as actors play an active role in perpetuating the power and endurance of institutions within organisations, they are not always inert conduits of institutional values. Rather they, more often than not, consciously comprehend institutional messages and act in accordance with these conscious cognitive frames to either fortify or crumble institutions and practice their agency in the organisational context. Rhetors, therefore, can enact the role of actors or agents in transmitting institutional logics (Anyonge et al. 2013:13; Frederickson et al. 2012:109; Green & Li 2011:1663; Hardy 2011:192; Hwang & Colyvas 2011:63; Clegg 2010:9; McPhee & Iverson 2009:63; Lammers & Barbour 2006:363; Terry 2003:12; Alvesson 1993:1004).		

Table 4. 3: Themes derived after the iterative coding process aligned to the 8 Communication Satisfaction Constructs

THEMES	Description of theme	Examples from the data and links to institutional positioning and constituted organisational culture
Communication climate	Climate describes how employees feel about their communication experiences within which they work and interact, which can vary between departments and units (Schneider et al. 2013:380; Eisenberg & Riley 2001:307; Neher 1997:93). Verwey and du Plooy-Cilliers (2002:166) define communication climate "as the subjectively experienced quality of an organisation's internal environment, which is determined by the perceptions that organisational members hold about communication activities, events, and behaviour within the organisation."	"Each unit is different, and different to the organisational culture of the entire municipality – depends on leadership. There are different types of leadership in the municipality. In the municipality as a whole, queries are noted, but not actioned on – no feedback is received on these queries. This affects the organisational culture – what management displays is what you get. Information travels mostly downwards." "What is important for organisational culture is supervisor-subordinate relationships." "I think we're quite bureaucratic in that to be honest I understand that we're governed by regulation and in order to achieve specific targets and I'll say this that as community there has to be some kind of structure so operating with that environment can have its pros and cons, it's very top down and I'm sort of in the middle so I think as a manager at board somebody at the next level will probably have a different perspective but for me it's top down."

Horizontal and informal communication	Horizontal communication involves an analysis of inter-departmental communication of the organisation in order to facilitate its efficiency, and includes items about problem-solving, teamwork, and communication among managers (Eunson 2008:558; Sutherland & Canwell 1997:64). Extent to which communication between co-workers and the information contained therein is accurate and free flowing (Downs 1988:113). This factor also includes satisfaction with the activeness of the grapevine	Inter-departmental communication only when and where needed – "forced communication" – "project-based"- task-related "We've got different sectors and the particular unit that I'm working with we don't communicate effectively with the other new ones so we have, at the moment we've got, our performance management system has a tool to their, our own performance targets and so there is a lack of communication in that respect because everyone's got their own, how can I say that?" "The horizontal communication is very informal. And it's very strong. There's a strong network that is built up by officials." "Lack of team building – needs to be consistent municipality-wide (horizontally/vertically, etc.), not just in a unit." "But I think our City Manager has tried to kind of get that out of the way. Because he's arranged to have, he has a Monday morning meeting. Through that Monday morning meeting, I think that kind of pulled everybody together."

Subordinate communication	How supervisors feel about the overall communication with their subordinates. Being able to communicate effectively with subordinates is an important indicator of good leadership skills among supervisors (Jones 2010:162).	It's an Initiative in line with the theme because we don't want to enter the space where we open personal issues because it is not our responsibility as a communications department but being managers, they've got through meetings." "Ja, on staff meetings. During the staff meeting give the feedback." "Look, there is structured feedback. Where you have a performance review list and you can talk about your projects and what you do and then what your challenges are etcetera." "We don't even have complaints boxes which is supposed to be used." "You go through the structure system where you'll have City Manager issuing out the circular to senior managers, senior managers in turn will cut paper information down to their supervisors, supervisors will cascade it further down to everybody down there at the grass root level till everybody gets the message. So that will be a structural communication, it is informed by the bureaucratic structure to see the City Manager there, because depending on the matter, there are matters which he can broadcast to everybody in the municipality, but there are issues that will need engagement where you need to engage your staff members because it's not only a one-way street when you talk of communication."

		"It's not dependent on one person, City Manager or the Mayor but every manager has got a responsibility on their performance contract. To communicate matters, cascade information to your staff members so it is not the responsibility of our office at the corporate communication department but it is a management responsibility."
Organisational (corporate) perspective	The organisational perspective dimension on the other hand, deals with the broadest kinds of information about the organisation as a whole, and refers to the information given out concerning the corporation and its goals and performance. It also encompasses knowledge about external events such as new government policies, which affect the organisation (Hargie & Tourish 2009:7).	"I think what we normally said, knowing what's going on within the Council. I think is one important thing for everyone in the department, knowing what's going on. I think it's critical and then also it's a level of details as well, because sometimes you find that the information is skimpy then you try, what is this thing all about, you know, sometimes, it's too long, you know we don't have time to read pages, pages and pages, you know you have success to a point a well-read document, it's a well-read document or any other communication that can be yours." Because we're dealing with lives in this particular aspect especially with our clients being police and fire and so forth but in most instances, decisions are arrived at in terms of policies, in terms of agreements and so forth. It's consultative, it's participative and it certainly is democratic. "from an emergency perspective, it's based on mass alerts, if something happens in the City

		it's required by us to send out mass alerts of pertinent information to the stakeholders or the people that do. On a real-time basis."
Organisational integration	The amount of information individuals receive about their direct working environment. Include the degree of satisfaction with information about departmental plans, the requirements of their job and related items, such as policies and benefits, as well as information about current events, departmental and personnel news. Information about such matters makes employees feel they have been integrated and engaged with the organisation (Hargie & Tourish 2009:7). The organisational perspective dimension on the other hand, deals with the broadest kinds of information about the organisation as a whole, and refers to the information given out concerning the corporation and its goals and performance. It also encompasses knowledge about external events such as new government policies, which affect the organisation (Hargie & Tourish 2009:7).	For me it would be, we have the meetings with the head but I don't think at the moment they that effective perhaps if we could have a structured forum well I'm saying forum for the lack of a better word where I come from is, we used to have what we call a GM forum, the General Manager of the whole organisation will meet with everybody the whole staff and I find that doing that it helps everybody even the people at the lowest level they can be effected." "Right, now the challenge with that is that in a day or in a week you get so much of information that's disseminated via info-info, however, amongst very good information it gets disseminated via info-info. There's also useless information gets disseminated. So good information gets lost in the mix of information that shouldn't be communicated." "When they go back to their centres, where they report to, they get to that information. At some stage, they will even mail letters, attach them to their pay slips. I don't know if you saw when you came in, where you'd see there are newspapers like this, like you see, this pile of newspapers."

		"Be it the departmental level, be it [unclear] be it at whatever level some big department where it's hard to have a meeting every month, they will cascade it down through their supervisors, who discuss it with their members. So that one level of communication, which is structured and hence we always say on the top of communication, people always make a mistake, thinking that communication is done by our department because it's the communication department."
Media quality	The media quality dimension looks at the usefulness, quality, and quantity of information received from communication sources, such as publications, memoranda, and meetings, through numerous channels (Downs 1988:113).	"At the moment it's not satisfactory, we're not using technology to the extent that we should be but then to a certain extent, you cannot blame the municipality because it's such a big municipality and there is so much information going around, even if it was available, maybe one wouldn't be able to access it all because to time constraints." "Like we have, we have TVs at places where customers go and pay their rates and water and lights account, that can be used more effectively by showing maybe news to the municipality about what is currently happening." "But I'm quite satisfied with the medium that's used. It's an electronic medium and of course, it's flashed out at info-info. Maybe it will be

		something that does not reflect the entire opinion of the department that I'm in."
Communication with superiors	Assesses subordinates' satisfaction with communication with their managers. the superior-communication dimension measures the openness of superiors to subordinates as well as superiors' ability to listen; and assesses the extent to which superiors are open to ideas, their willingness to listen and pay attention, and the extent to which supervisors offer guidance to their employees in solving job-related problems (Downs 1988:113).	"I think it always shouldn't be top-down, there needs to be, like an open door, not an open door because, you know I understand it's the culture and you know, we operate from within, there must be some space of flexibility if we need to engage through other mediums then so be it". "In the sense that everything goes down, personnel, very little communication upwards, it's always challenges upwards, I mean I have an issue myself where staff in my department have issues with me. They never engage me. The first time I heard that I had an issue was when my boss called a management meeting and he raised the issue." "…and we do have our staff meetings, for instance, in the organisation. And we do have informal meetings as well but the challenge more is the fact that your senior management is in meetings all the time, strategic sessions, on an organisational level so sometimes when you need to bounce things off."

Personal feedback	Personal feedback, on the other hand, is a factor that contains questions about superiors' understanding of problems faced on the job and whether or not employees feel the criteria by which they are judged to be clear (Eunson 2008:326).	"We have thousands of staff members working in different departments, working in different sides, some of them they won't report it within the office, they'll go straight to their site of work so their sequence of meeting, maybe they will meet maybe twice a year because of the site. And you find that the senior management will meet them once a year. I know the Parks department will have a road show every year where they will meet in their clothes and it becomes a big mass meeting then they will raise the issues at that foots level. Further than that, our HR guys." "It would be a two-way street where staff members will voice their thinking around the matter so that one will go via the senior manager, the senior managers will discuss it, especially where there's a need for clarity around the, especially on policy issues, it's not something you can communicate via circular to everybody, you need managers to discuss it with their staff members at meetings." "Well as a communications department in the publications we always provide that stuff from within our publications where we invite people to tell us about any issues the municipality but in these instances it doesn't get used."

4.3.3.4 Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability

To establish the trustworthiness of research, qualitative investigators speak of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability that are interrelated concepts which underpin conceptual, theoretical and methodological rigour (DeJonckheere & Vaughn 2019:7; Stumpfegger 2017; Cassell 2011:512; Creswell 2011:14; Silverman 2011:360; Babbie & Mouton 2003:277). According to Silverman (2011:360), conceptual rigour denotes theoretical transparency attained "by making explicit the theoretical stance from which the interpretation takes place and showing how this produces particular interpretations and excludes others, while methodological rigour refers to transparency in research processes through describing the research strategy and data analysis methods in a sufficiently detailed manner". Therefore, Pandey (2014:5751) and Babbie and Mouton (2003:277) explain that providing detailed descriptions of the methodologies and methods used, as well as the theoretical, conceptual and paradigmatic underpinnings is important to depict the connections between the data and the literature and to ensure the empirical soundness of qualitative research in terms of accurately reflecting participants' perspectives.

Credibility, according to Stumpfegger (2017), Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams and Blackman (2016), Silverman (2011:384) and Lincoln and Guba (1985:219), establishes the integrity of the qualitative study that can be achieved through methods such as:

- data saturation,
- using data from various sources to confirm the findings,
- using more than one theory to interpret the findings, and
- rigorous analysis and interpretation processes.

While credibility foregrounds the truth-value of a study, transferability denotes the extent to which the findings can be applied in other contexts and underpins the link between conceptual and methodological rigour (Moon et al. 2016; Silverman 2011:379; Babbie & Mouton 2003:277). In other words, transferability refers to the applicability of the design in similar contexts, which can be attained through rich descriptions of participant perceptions and of the qualitative research process in terms of methodological rigour (Franklin, Cody & Ballan 2010:356). Although statistical generalisation is not the focus of qualitative research, it is important to determine how the conclusions can be applicable in similar contexts to achieve similar patterns in research findings (Stumpfegger 2017; Lincoln & Guba 1985:219). Furthermore, not only does the detailed coverage of the methodological and theoretical frameworks enhance transferability, it also exhibits the dependability of findings

(Stumpfegger 2017; Moon et al. 2016). Dependability refers to the soundness of the qualitative study, which is achieved through careful documentation of the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes (DeVault 2019; Franklin et al. 2010:356). Finally, confirmability details how closely the findings present the research participants' narratives, which can be achieved through a detailed analysis of methodological and paradigmatic preferences and is realised when credibility, transferability and dependability have been established (DeJonckheere & Vaughn 2019:7; Stumpfegger 2017; Moon et al. 2016; Lincoln & Guba 1985:323). In this case, it is important to keep a record of the analysis process, from the raw data stage leading up to the analysis, coding, and interpretation phases, to document the pragmatic processes followed to reach the findings.

According to the discussions put forth in this section, the extent to which this research is understood to be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable, is apparent. A thorough literature review has been put forward in Chapter 3 outlining and discussing the theoretical and conceptual foundation of the study that guided the development of the research process and the interpretation of findings. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that data saturation was reached in the qualitative data collection process, as explained in Section 4.3.3.1, and that a logical data analysis and interpretation process was followed and documented (see Section 4.3.3.3 for an explanation). The integration of qualitative and quantitative data sources and the inclusion of a variety of views derived from the maximum variation sample also enhanced the credibility of the study. The detailed documentation and descriptions of the research design and implementation in section 6.3 as well as the conceptual and theoretical framework provided in Chapter 3 display the transparency of the research process followed in this study and foreground the dependability of the study and the transferability of the findings to similar contexts. Finally, the researcher exhibits confirmability of qualitative findings by reporting on the ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological stance followed in this study, demonstrating how the findings and interpretations emerge from the raw data, theories and constructs.

4.3.4 Quantitative element of research design

The quantitative strand of the empirical segment comprised a standardised questionnaire distributed to a stratified random sample of respondents, which in the case of the present study was based on randomly selecting samples from each of the nine clusters within the municipality, who met the temporal eligibility criteria (employed post-2016 elections). This immediate collection was necessary in order to provide a generalised metric of employee communication satisfaction across the

municipality, allowing the study to empirically document the perceptions of internal communication following the P-A disruption of the 2016 municipal election.

While qualitative research is based on more inductive approaches to data gathering, quantitative research utilises deductive data gathering and analysis techniques that commence with predetermined constructs for measurement (Crossman 2019a; Bordens & Abbott 2014:28; Vogt et al. 2014:431; Babbie & Mouton 2003:49). Moreover, when the data are collected and analysed in accordance with standardised methodological techniques and precise probability sampling procedures, the results can be generalised to the larger population from which the units of analysis are selected, which endorses the external validity of a study (Howard 2019; Bordens & Abbott 2014:160; Verhoeven 2011:36). Foley (2018) and Miller (2017:207) explain that probability sampling refers to a process of random selection that assures that the different units within a research population have equal likelihood of being chosen in the sample and supports population inferences from the sample. Therefore, a probability sampling method was used for the quantitative strand of this study, which is explained in detail in the section below, to allow inference of the results to the *eThekwini Municipality* as a whole. In addition to the discussion of the specific probability sampling technique utilised for this segment of the study, the ensuing section puts forth a discussion of the data collection and analysis processes, the research method and tool, and the reliability and validity of this segment of the study.

4.3.4.1 Sampling, data collection and capturing procedure

Stratified random sampling refers to a probability sampling method that divides the population into different strata in order to ensure the representativity of units across different groups and sub-groups within the population (Cleave 2019; Hayes 2019; Malato 2019; Lund Research Limited 2012). Hall (2019), Hayes (2019) and Bordens and Abbott (2014:280) elaborate that this type of sampling ensures that the final sample comprises units from each stratum, provides a basis for evaluating differences between homogenous sections in the research population, and when combined, provides a more representative view of the population. Moreover, Hayes (2019) adds that, although stratified sampling requires higher levels of care and effort on the part of the researcher, this sampling technique ensures reduced sampling bias as various homogenous strata of the population are included in the sample, which means that smaller sample sizes for each stratum can yield statistically significant results.

As the researcher had gained permission and access to all nine clusters via the Human Resources Department and various cluster and unit heads, this sampling method was successfully implemented across the municipality. Once permission and access to the various cluster and unit heads were attained through the formal processes of the municipality, employees from each cluster were randomly selected to participate in this segment of the study. Cluster heads coordinated the distribution of the paper survey through their units and dictated the finite number of cases per cluster. A larger number of questionnaires were distributed to bigger clusters (estimations of size were indicated by cluster heads) according to the sampling frames per stratum. As mentioned earlier, the researcher did not have access to the sampling frames for each cluster due to the legal stipulations related to the protection of employees' personal information (Welz 2016; Workpool 2016; Monahan & Fisher 2015: 712). As a consequence, the exact size of each cluster is not known Although the sampling frames for all clusters were used for the selection of participants, due to issues of anonymity and confidentiality, the sampling frames were not made available to the researcher and the sampling was carried out with the assistance of the human resources department who synchronised the random selection of participants from the sampling frames for each cluster (as guided by the principle of computer-generated random selection) and notified cluster and unit heads to notify selected participants for this segment of the empirical study.

500 questionnaires were administered, and 420 completed questionnaires were received. After data cleaning, 76 questionnaires (15.2%) were spoiled and therefore eliminated, leaving 314 completed questionnaires for analysis. The realised sample (N=314) for the surveys, thus, represents an overall response rate of 62.8% after cleaning of the data. The sample distribution and the response rates per cluster after cleaning of data are represented in Tables 6.4 and 6.5, respectively:

Table 4. 4: Sample distribution of strata for the quantitative element of the study

Cluster	Sample Size (N)	Probability
1. Office of the City Manager -	21	6.7%
2. City Manager's Operations Office	6	1.9%
3. Community and Emergency Services	56	17.8%
4. Corporate and Human Resources	47	15.0%
5. Economic Development and Planning	45	14.3%
6. Finance	30	9.6%
7. Governance and International Relations	16	5.1%
8. Human Settlement, Engineering Service and Transport	23	7.3%
9. Trading Services	70	22.3%
TOTAL (N)	**314**	**100.0%**

Table 4. 5: Response rates per cluster

Level	Question-naires Distributed	Count – After Data Cleaning	Response Rate – After Data Cleaning
1. Office of The City Manager	35	21	60.00%
2. City Manager's Operations Office	15	6	40.00%
3. Community and Emergency Services	85	56	65.88%
4. Corporate and Human Resources	80	47	58.75%
5. Economic Development and Planning	75	45	60.00%
6. Finance	45	30	66.67%
7. Governance and International Relations	30	16	53.33%
8. Human Settlement, Engineering Service, and Transport	40	23	57.75%
9. Trading Services	95	70	77.78%
Total	**500**	**314**	**62.80%**

During the analysis stage, further stratification between managers and non-managers per cluster was considered as another pertinent parameter in the delineation of the accessible population. This further stratification was not carried out with the initial sampling procedure, but during the analysis phase. The data for this additional stratification were gleaned from the demographic data provided in the questionnaires to try to understand the differences in responses between these sub-strata. The interest in this level of stratification became apparent during the qualitative segment of the study, where some unique insights were uncovered in managers' perceptions, and the researcher wanted to see what the quantitative data revealed in this aspect. These details are explained in Chapter 5, which deals with the findings and results of this study. Further stratification of the realised sample set according to management and non-management levels is thus outlined below:

Table 4. 6: Response rates according to management level

Level	Count
Management	108
Non-management	166
Not specified	40
Total	**314**

Table 4. 7: Distributions of response rates according to management level per cluster

Level	Management	Non-management	Unspecified	Total
Office of the City Manager	1	17	3	21
City Manager's Operations Office	2	4		6
Community and Emergency Services	15	26	15	56
Corporate and Human Resources	14	22	11	47
Economic Development and Planning	19	20	6	45
Finance	11	17	2	30
Governance and International Relations	3	13		16
Human Settlement Engineering Service and Transport	5	18		23
Trading Services	38	29	3	70
Total	108	166	40	**314**

It should be noted that the organisational structuration of tasks is quite complex within the *eThekwini Municipality.* There are various levels of management within varying tiers of task allocations, even at ground level within the municipal structure. These range from upper management, middle management, and lower-level managers (such as ground-level supervisors, administrative managers, et cetera) according to the requirements within each cluster, which only became apparent during interaction with research participants. Therefore, the data for managers represents a significant proportion of the figures, which is a limitation. Nonetheless, these further levels of stratification can be carried out more precisely in future studies. The non-management category could also be divided into further categories (such as administration, ground-level workers, etc.) for future research.

4.3.4.2 Research method and measurement tool

A survey, in the form of a printed questionnaire, was utilised for the quantitative segment of the present study. Surveys are an age-old tool that government agencies, academia and the business sector use extensively to garner valuable information (Cleave 2019; Miller 2017:205). The main

concern with surveys, however, is ensuring suitable response rates (Cook 2019). Although online surveys are easier and cheaper to distribute and analyse, Fitzgerald, Hockey, Jones, Mishra, Waller and Dobson (2019), Pride Surveys (2016) and Porter (2004:98) observe that printed questionnaires yield a greater response rate, firstly because they appeal to population groups in lower socio-economic and educational demographics, who either do not have access to digital technologies, or are not comfortable with sharing information via these online tools.

Secondly, online surveys seem less appealing to respondents who have access to online technologies, which can be attributed to the lack of personalisation and interaction with the researcher in the distribution and collection of surveys (Fitzgerald et al. 2019). Thirdly, despite the additional resources required to do so, the researcher can garner the support of opinion leaders to assist with debriefing participants and distributing and collecting printed surveys within a specified time frame, which is not so easy with online surveys (Pride Surveys 2016; Porter 2004:98). Given these justifications and because many employees in the municipality do not have access to digital technologies, printed surveys were used for the present study to reach the widest range of employees at varying job levels across all clusters of the municipality. This was pragmatically feasible, considering the paradigmatic position of this study.

The Downs and Hazen's (1977) Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ), a standardised instrument that has been utilised in various research studies was chosen as the instrument of choice. The reason for using a standardised questionnaire is the proven validity and reliability of the instrument and the constructs which have been widely established in many studies (*see for example* Mandiwana 2019:59; Sharma 2015; Zwijze-Koning & De Jong 2015; Ramirez 2012; Okay & Okay 2009; Zwijze-Koning & De Jong 2007; Jones 2006; Rubin, Palmgreen & Sypher 2004:116; Pincus 1986; Downs & Hazen 1977; Downs, Hazen & Quiggins 1973). The CSQ provides a relatively short and understandable instrument that evaluates employees' perceptions of internal communication satisfaction within the organisation and is based on a Likert-scale structure organised on a seven-point measure ranging from 1 (very satisfied) to 7 (very dissatisfied) (Ramirez 2012:16; Okay & Okay 2009:55; Zwijze-Koning & de Jong 2007:263). This questionnaire was deemed sufficient in terms of answering all the necessary research questions and sub-problems. This instrument measures communication satisfaction based on eight validated dimensions. The dimensions then become the constructs for measurement, each of which contains five items (Clampitt & Girard 1993:84; Downs 1988:114; Downs & Hazen 1977:65).

The eight constructs of communication satisfaction as determined by Downs and Hazen consider employees' satisfaction with:

i communication climate
ii horizontal and informal communication
iii subordinate communication
iv organisational (corporate perspective)
v organisational integration
vi media quality
vii communication with superiors

"Constructs" refer to abstract concepts in social science research, such as communication satisfaction and job productivity, for example, that can be formulated as variables of measurement and can be assessed using different rating scales (Vinney 2019; Allen & Seaman 2007). A scale is a type of composite measure that is made up of several items that, together, evaluate a construct (Vinney 2019). Crossman (2019b) points out that social science researchers often develop these scales themselves or use standardised scales that have been developed and perfected over time. Of these scales, Józsa and Morgan (2017:8) and Allen and Seaman (2007) explain that researchers in the social sciences extensively use the Likert scale in survey research to measure opinions scientifically. The Likert scale is a closed-ended bipolar scaling method that allows for more nuances on a continuum of agreeability as opposed to a straightforward dichotomous response option (Vinney 2019).

Likert's idea focused on using a range of equally spaced anchors with a numerical weighting that can vary from being very positive (such as very satisfied) to being very disapproving (such as very dissatisfied) to test the various components of a construct where "very satisfied" is considered a more acutely positive response in comparison to "satisfied" (Vinney 2019; Cherry 2018). Krosnick and Presser (2010:270) explain that each type of answer on the continuum is given a numerical value, usually 1 for strongly disagree, up to 5 for strongly agree. The authors go on to explain that these scales that measure latent constructs can also be scored in reverse order, that is, 1 for strongly agree, up to 5 for strongly disagree. Either way is acceptable, as long as respondents clearly understand the scoring method, and the meaning of the value on each point on the scale, which ought to reflect the two extreme viewpoints on either end with less intense options in the centre.

Generally, the Likert scaling technique consists of an odd number of anchors that classify the centre point as a neutral option (Chyung, Roberts, Swanson & Hankinson 2017:18; Hecht 1978: 355). However, an important distinction needs to be made between a Likert scale and a Likert item, as this determines how the data can be analysed. A Likert item, as Crossman (2019b) and Vaske, Beaman and Sponarski (2017:164) note, is simply a statement that respondents are asked to evaluate according to their level of agreement or disagreement to any kind of subjective or objective criteria, generally on an ordered scale of between five and ten levels. However, Vaske et al. (2017:163), Gliem and Gliem (2003:83) and Nunnally and Bernstein (1994:69) caution that single-item measures exhibit higher random measurement error, which indicates lower levels of validity, reliability and accuracy, as they rarely embody the different elements of a specific trait or a complex theoretical concept.

A Likert scale, on the other hand, refers to a cohort of Likert items that are logically related to the predefined construct (Bhattacherjee 2019:157; Vaske et al. 2017:164; Józsa & Morgan 2017:8; Allen & Seaman 2007; Carifio & Perla 2007:115). The minimum number of items needed to have a measurement scale is five, due to various reliability, validity and generalisability considerations (Cherry 2018). However, more items will be needed in order to assess more complex constructs (Sauro 2016). These statements are intended to provide a representative sample of all possible opinions or attitudes about the issue that the construct encompasses (Józsa & Morgan 2017:8; Vaske et al. 2017:164; Likert 1932). Nevertheless, as Morse, Gullekson, Morris and Popovich (2011:480) and Cronbach and Meehl (1955:300) point out, researchers need to check the reliability of such a scale, usually with measures such factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha measure of reliability, which are discussed in Section 6.3.8.4.

The scores of several Likert items that measure the same construct are added together in order to obtain a summated Likert score for the construct within the scale (Cherry 2018). Vaske et al. (2017:164), Gliem and Gliem (2003:83) and Nunnally and Bernstein (1994:67) assert that, when the scores of individual items are added to obtain a summated score, measurement error averages out. Emphasis is thus placed on summated scoring of the items within a scale according to the logic of Likert scaling, which the present study utilises. This means that a scale contains multiple items and the scores of these items are combined to obtain a summated average for each construct. Therefore, multi-item scales of measure, such as the Likert scale utilised in the CSQ, were developed to measure the differing elements of complex abstract constructs reliably.

With reference to this study, permission was thus sought from Professor CW Downs, one of the original designers of the CSQ, to utilise the standardised instrument for the research. Permission was subsequently granted (see Addendum F). The instrument begins with a cover letter that entails the confidentiality statement and consent form, which are pertinent ethical considerations for social research (see Addendum E for the Questionnaire). Bhattacherjee (2019:281) and Whelan (2007) explain that a cover letter generally introduces the researcher, outlines the purpose and focus of the research, assures respondents of their anonymity and voluntary participation, and requests their consent for participation in the study, which are important ethical considerations. The questionnaire, as devised by Downs and Hazen, begins with three overarching questions related to job satisfaction and then proceeds to Section A, which deals with the 40 items related to communication satisfaction, which is the primary focus of this research. Section B of the questionnaire entails demographic questions.

4.3.4.3 Data analysis methods

The analysis uses both descriptive and inferential statistics. The purpose of descriptive statistics is to depict the most important features of a set of sample data, but to reveal insufficient detail about the population from which the sample was taken (Guetterman 2019:2). Inferential statistics, on the other hand, uses sample data in order to make reliable conclusions about the population from which the data originated (Trochim 2020c). The mean and standard deviation are the best measures of central tendency for interval data, which can be further explored in order to conduct inferential statistical analysis, while modes, medians, and frequencies are more suitable for ordinal data (Vaske et al. 2017:164; Norman 2010:628).

In this respect, individual Likert-items can only be analysed using descriptive statistics, as they are considered ordinal level measures, and thus a poor choice for inferential statistical analyses (Cherry 2018; Sullivan & Artino 2013:542). In contrast, Kenton (2020), Charpentier (2018:255), Osinska & Stawicki 2017:120; Sauro (2016), Dean (2016:289), Norman (2010:628) and Carifio and Perla (2007:115) explain that summing together several Likert items to create a valid and reliable scale adds value and variability to the data, which according to the central limit theorem (CLT), justifiably approximates an interval-level variable. The authors thus argue that the CLT allows treatment of the data as interval data measuring a latent variable (an abstract concept that is not directly observed, but rather inferred from other variables [using rating scales, for example] that are directly observed and measured). Therefore, as the arguments presented thus far rationalise, the summated score of a series of five or more items that form a Likert-scale, which describes a latent construct, can be

analysed using means and standard deviations to describe the scale and explored further using inferential statistics, as is performed in the present study.

The CLT, as Ganti (2019), Dean (2016:289) and Norman (2010:628) elucidate, infers that the average of the sample means and standard deviations will equal the population mean and standard deviation. In other words, according to the CLT, the mean (average) of the sample data mirrors the overall mean of the wider population, where researchers can assertively generalise the results to the population. A second important premise of the CLT, as Charpentier (2018:255) and Norman (2010:628) assert, is that as the sample size increases, the distribution of sample means approximates a normal distribution. Kenton (2020) and McLeod (2019a) add that sample sizes equal to or greater than 30 are considered sufficient for the CLT to hold and can accurately predict the characteristics of a population, on condition that the population distribution is roughly bell-shaped (normal distribution). Should the population mean display a non-normal distribution, that is in the form of skewness, multiple peaks or outliers, then, McLeod (2019a) and Norman (2010:628) caution that slightly larger samples will be required. Nonetheless, Ganti (2019) and McLeod (2019a) mention that what makes the CLT so remarkable is that no matter what the distribution of the population is, the shape of the sampling distribution will approach normality as the sample size (N) increases. This is useful, as by selecting several random samples from a population the sample means will cluster together, enabling the data to make a reliable estimate of the population mean.

Thus, once the summed responses of a Likert scale fulfil the assumptions of the CLT as discussed above, parametric statistical analysis can be applied (Gombolay & Shah 2016:49; Norman 2010:628; Carifio & Perla 2007:115). Parametric and non-parametric tests are the two categories of inferential statistical methods (Mishra, Pandey, Singh, Keshri & Sabaretnam 2019:298). Parametric tests provide more accurate and reliable estimations of the populations and, therefore, presuppose underlying statistical distributions in the data; namely, the normal distribution of the sample and homogeneous variances of the samples to ensure that the results are reliable (McLeod 2019a; Verma & Abdel-Salam 2019:66). Non-parametric tests do not depend on the assumptions of normality and homogenous variances, but merely rely on random sampling and independent, mutually exclusive selection of sampling units in the different strata (Verma & Abdel-Salam 2019:142).

The advantage of using a parametric test instead of a non-parametric equivalent, according to Grant (2019), Verma and Abdel-Salam (2019:67), and Norman (2010:628) is that the former will have more

statistical power than the latter as the results obtained from non-parametric statistics have a lower degree of confidence than if the results were obtained using parametric statistics as there is a concern that nonparametric tests have a lower probability of detecting an effect that actually exists. Nonetheless, Mishra, Singh, Pandey, Mishra and Pandey (2019:409) point out that parametric tests often have non-parametric equivalents and can be used in instances where the assumptions of normality and homogenous variances are not met in certain segments of a study and where the sample size guidelines have not been fulfilled to provide meaningful results during parametric testing. Hence, on the basis of these arguments, parametric analysis of ordinary averages of Likert scale data, in the form of analysis of variance techniques (ANOVA), for example, is thus justifiable by the CLT.

In view of the justifications presented thus far, as the quantitative data fulfilled the precepts of the logic of Likert scaling and summated scoring in accordance with the CLT, the quantitative data for the present study were analysed with measures of central tendency (such as the mean, variance and standard deviation); one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA); post-hoc t-tests; and Cohen's f-squared (f^2) effect size, measure using the statistical analysis software called SAS JMP. In the rare instances where the underlying assumptions of parametric tests were not met, non-parametric tests such as the Tukey-Kramer post-hoc t-test and the Games-Howell post hoc test were carried out. Moreover, although the findings report on the summated scores of constructs in accordance with the logic of Likert scaling, descriptive statistics per item within each construct are also reported on to identify areas of variation in opinions within a scale that could be explored for further scale development in future studies.

It is also important to note that the numerical coding of the original questionnaire runs from 1 (very satisfied) to 7 (very dissatisfied), as per the design of the original authors. This scoring method was retained and used as such in the analysis of data. The researcher did not reverse-score the items on the questionnaire, firstly because all 40 items related to communication satisfaction used the same rating scale, and secondly, to avoid any errors in statistical calculations during the reverse-coding process in the analysis phase, considering the size and complexity of the data set (Sexton-Radek 2018:1432; Salkind 2007:845). Hence, **lower mean values** would lean towards **greater satisfaction,** and *higher mean values* would lean towards *greater dissatisfaction*.

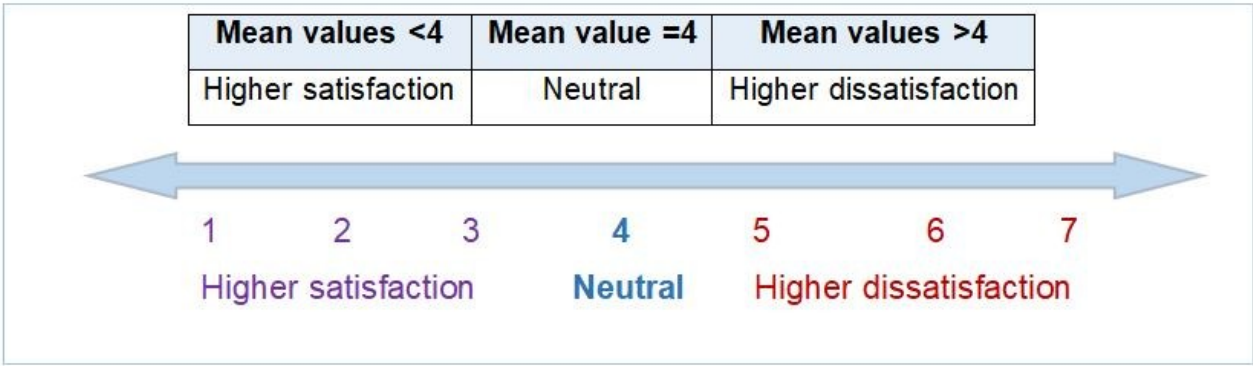


Figure 4. 3: Analysis of mean values according to the scoring method

Additionally, although a wide range of demographic information was included in the questionnaire, only the demographic details of the survey respondents that were relevant to addressing the research problem of this study are presented in the findings in Chapter 5, the most important being the distribution of respondents across clusters in the municipality in view of protecting the identity and personal information of respondents. Of peripheral significance to this study are the educational levels as well as the age distribution of respondents that shed light on the diversity of the overall research sample, which is, nevertheless, also presented in the next chapter.

4.3.4.3.1. Measures of central tendency

The mean, variance and the standard deviation are measures of central tendency that precede most advanced inferential statistical analysis methods (Trochim 2020a; Terre Blanche et al. 2008:199; Schwab 1999:153). While the mean is the average value of all scores in a specific list of measures, the variance and standard deviation describe the dispersion of the data set around the mean (Trochim 2020a). The variance ascertains the average degree to which **each observation** varies from the mean in terms of squared deviations, where larger values represent greater dispersion (Musselwhite & Wesolowski 2018:1789). The standard deviation, on the other hand, is the square root of the variance that precisely measures the average distance between the values of the data in the set and the mean and is generally used in statistical procedures as it is easier to interpret (Hampel 2019; Field 2009:35).

A smaller standard deviation indicates that more of the data are clustered around the mean, while a larger standard deviation value suggests that the data are more spread out from the mean, indicating greater variability in the data (Hargrave 2019; Sajid 2019). Technically, the standard deviation is the average distance of data from the mean, which indicates how individual responses differ from the

average responses. Standard deviations do not, however, indicate the statistically significant differences between multiple mean values of different sample strata (Hampel 2019; Vogt et al. 2014:248). This would require more complex statistical analysis, such as the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test.

4.3.4.3.2. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA)

For this study, one-way ANOVA tests were conducted in order to determine differences in mean scores with respect to the communication satisfaction variable (broken down into its eight constructs) across the various groups (in this case, clusters in the municipality) with the purpose of showing differences in the satisfaction and perceptions per group. For the purpose of statistical analyses in this study, the significance level for all tests were set at a 5 percent significance level (p=0.05).

The one-way ANOVA provides multiple sample comparisons and is commonly used to test statistical differences between the means of two or more independent groups (i.e. the samples do not overlap and are randomly selected) (Shafer and Zhang 2020; Sajid 2019; Field 2009:348). The test uses sample data in order to make inferences about the properties of an entire population and is used to test general, rather than specific differences among means and requires one categorical factor for the independent variable and a continuous (i.e. interval or ratio) factor for the dependent variable (Elgabry 2019; Boon 2018:86). The independent variable ought to have at least two categories (groups), but generally has three or more groups when used in a one-way ANOVA (Sajid 2019; Boon 2018:86). The values of the categorical factor thus divide the data into groups, such as clusters, and management levels at *eThekwini Municipality,* while the dependent variable, which in this instance is communication satisfaction, is measured using eight interval level variables, as explained in Sections 4.3.4.2 and 4.3.4.3.

The one-way ANOVA determines whether the differences between the group means are **statistically significant** (Elgabry 2019). To explicate further, the F-ratio as a one-way analysis of variance assesses whether the expected values of a quantitative variable within groups differ from each other (Shafer & Zhang 2020; McLeod 2019b; Sajid 2019). The F-ratio ought to be used in combination with the p-value to reach a decision on the statistical significance of the overall results of the one-way ANOVA (Herzog, Francis & Clarke 2019:72; Vogt et al. 2014: 248). The assumptions of normality and homogeneous variances must be met for the whole ANOVA procedure that includes the F-test, which is a ratio (F-ratio) of two variances (i.e., the ratio of the variance **between** groups

to the variance **within** groups) (Shafer & Zhang 2020; McLeod 2019b; Sajid 2019; Boon 2018:89; Raunig 2018:659). Herzog et al. (2019:64) and McDonald (2014:148) further clarify that, should the one-way ANOVA return a statistically significant result (i.e., the ANOVA's F-ratio is high [i.e. ≥ 1] and the p-value be small [i.e. < 0.05], it is accepted that the difference in means is likely **not** due to sampling error. Consequently, it can be deduced that at least two group means differ.

It can be understood that the variance **between** the samples is equivalent to the variance **within** the samples if the F-ratio is less than or equal to one (≤1), indicating that there is no difference between the means, no matter what significance level is used for the test (Bevans 2020; Boon 2018:88; Mahbobi & Tieman 2015:48). This implies that the groups have similar views about the phenomenon under investigation. On the other hand, if the F-ratio is much greater than one (>1), the variance **between** samples is probably the basis of most of the variance in the total sample, and the difference between means is significant (Herzog et al. 2019:64; Dean 2016:583). This means that one can confidently conclude that the views between the samples differ. The p-value, Elgabry (2019) and Sajid (2019) explain, is computed from the F ratio. A p-value smaller than 0.05 indicates statistical significance at a 95% level of confidence (Kenton 2020; Terre Blanche et al. 2008:237). Furthermore, low p-values (<0.05) suggest that the differences between means are not due to random variation, while high p-values (>0.05) suggest that differences between samples cannot be distinguished from differences that might arise simply from random variation (Kent State University Libraries 2020; Elgabry 2019; Field 2016:51). In other words, if the overall p-value is large (>0.05), the data do not offer any reason to conclude that the means differ. However, if the p-value is small (<0.05) it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between means. However, Shafer and Zhang (2020); Elgabry (2019) and Herzog et al. (2019:64) caution that this **does not** mean that every mean value differs from every other mean value, only that at least one differs from the rest. Nevertheless, post-hoc t-tests can complement the ANOVA results to identify which **particular differences** between pairs of means are significant.

4.3.4.3.3. Post-hoc t-tests

Although the one-way ANOVA indicates if there is an overall difference between groups (statically significant difference), it cannot indicate which specific groups differed (pairwise comparisons) (Shafer & Zhang 2020; Sajid 2019; Raunig 2018:660; Vogt et al 2014:249; McHugh 2011:203). The pairwise comparison, attained through post-hoc t-tests, measures the differences between all probable pairs of group means (Mishra et al. 2019:407; Newsom 2019; Kim 2015:175). When the

initial F-test indicates that statistically significant differences exist between group means, contrasts are useful for determining which specific means are significantly different (Kent State University 2020; Field 2009:372). This is done through post hoc t-tests in the one-way ANOVA (Foster, Lane, Scott, Hebl, Guerra, Osherson & Zimmer 2018:209; Kim 2015:172). Navarro (2020), Vogt et al. (2014:250) and McHugh (2011:203) further explain that post hoc tests are designed for situations in which the researcher has already obtained a significant F-test score set with a factor that consists of three or more means and additional exploration of the differences among means is needed to provide specific information on which means are significantly different from each other (pairwise comparisons). Since multiple-comparison parametric post-hoc tests are robust and can contend with minor violations in sample sizes, there are various tests specifically designed for unequal sample sizes. Where the assumptions of parametric tests are not met, Navarro (2020) and McDonald (2014:152) clarify that, such as when the assumption of normality does not hold, for example, non-parametric equivalent tests can be used, as was done in this study. Hence, this study utilised post-hoc t-tests to determine where statistically significant differences between means occurred. The Tukey-Kramer post-hoc t-test, specifically designed for unequal sample sizes, was considered for this study.

McDonald (2014:149) explains that the Tukey-Kramer method can be applied for comparisons of unequal-sized groups, on condition that the homogeneity of variances assumption is fulfilled. Non-parametric equivalents, namely, Games Howell post hoc test, were utilised where the assumptions for parametric testing were not met in a few isolated instances, such as when the assumption of homogeneity is violated or when the sample size is small. In cases where n-sizes differed, McDonald (2020), Willden (2019), and Field (2016:603) go on to explain, but the assumption of homogenous variances is violated, the Games Howell post hoc test was considered – especially for certain instances when the data was further stratified into management levels thereby resulting in very small sample sizes – to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between means within these levels (namely, management, non-management, and the unspecified level) for each of the communication satisfaction constructs. Only statistically significant results of these additional strata are reported in the findings in Chapter 5, although all the findings are presented in Addendum H. Where results showed some statistically significant differences, but sample sizes were very small due to the stratification of data, these were reported, but not considered, as the sample is so small that it is not meaningful to consider the result. Further testing can be considered for future studies, with larger sample sizes for these additional strata to investigate these differences further.

4.3.4.3.4. Effect size - Cohen's f-squared (f^2)

Although p-values determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the means, it does not identify the size of the difference (Steyn 2020b; Laken & Caldwell 2019; Kim 2016:232; Coe 2002:1). Effect size is a simple way of quantifying the difference between various mean values and has many advantages over the use of tests of statistical significance alone, emphasising the magnitude of the difference rather than confounding this with sample size (Steyn 2020a; Schäfer & Schwarz 2019:1; Coe 2002:2; Cohen 1992:155). The effect size is also called the **practical significance**, and reflects small, medium, or large differences between means (Steyn 2019; Selya, Rose, Dierker, Hedeker, & Mermelstein. 2012:111). There are various indices for effect size, depending on the statistical test used and the purpose (i.e., either establishing the size of difference between groups or the magnitude of the correlation between variables) (Schäfer & Schwarz 2019:1). Cohen's f^2 is generally used to measure the effect size for a one-way ANOVA and refers to a measure comparing the extent of the difference between two or more group means (Steyn 2020b; Kim 2016:232). In other words, as Kim (2016:232) and Salkind (2016:185) clarify, Cohen's f^2 is a way of quantifying the difference between two or more groups in terms of standard deviation units, thereby putting the magnitude of the difference into context.

Cohen's f^2 measure suggests that the value of 0.10 and above be considered a small effect size, a value of 0.25 and above represents a medium effect size and 0.40 and above a large effect size (Salkind 2016:185). This means that, if two groups' means do not differ by 0.10 standard deviations or more, the difference is trivial, even if it is statistically significant; indicating that it is possible to have high statistical significance (low p-value), but also low effect size (practical significance) (Schäfer & Schwarz 2019:1; Kim 2016:232). Hence, Cohen's f^2 measure was used in this study to determine the size of the difference between the means (practical significance), where such differences manifested between the groups and subgroups within *eThekwini Municipality.*

4.3.4.5 Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity are two of the most important aspects to consider in order to ensure sound quantitative research measurement (Cuncic 2020; Morrison 2020a; Ruel, Wagner & Gillespie 2016:88; Murray 2013:259). Of the pragmatic measures of reliability and validity used in survey research, internal consistency is considered to be the most important form of reliability assessment and construct validity is considered the most important measure of a Likert scale's validity, while

external validity is an important indicator of the generalisability of a study's findings that is dependent on precise probability sampling techniques (i.e. random selection of respondents) (Bhattacherjee 2019:103; Green, Yang, Alt, Brinkley, Gray, Hogan & Cowan 2016:750; Ponterotto & Ruckdeschel 2007:997; Osburn 2000:343). Each of these elements is discussed systematically hereunder, beginning with determining the soundness of the measuring instrument through internal consistency and construct validity assessments.

Internal consistency or reliability is concerned with the interrelatedness of a sample of test items, whereas construct validity refers to the homogeneity (or unidimensionality) of the scales in a measuring instrument (Trochim 2020b; Trochim 2020e; Bhattacherjee 2019:119; Clark & Watson 1995:312). Although they are related and interdependent, internal consistency and construct validity are not the same notions. Construct validity assessments deal with comparing the obtained measurements with theoretical premises and generally consist of convergent and discriminant (sometimes called divergent) validity estimations that work in unison in establishing the unidimensionality of measurement scales (Bhattacherjee 2019:115; Rammstedt, Beierlein, Brähler, Eid, Hartig, Kersting, Liebig, Lukas, Mayer, Menold, Schupp & Weichselgartner 2015:21; Knapp 2009:114). Trochim (2020d), Tavakol and Dennick (2011:53) and Osburn (2000:344) explain that a measure or a scale is said to be unidimensional if its items measure a single latent trait or construct. Morrison (2020b) adds that factor analysis is one way to assess the dimensionality and underlying structure of a survey during the development of the measurement scales, which usually precedes the evaluation of internal consistency.

Internal consistency, however, enumerates the level of consistency between the items in a scale to determine how well the items within a scale test the same underlying construct. However, although internal consistency assessment is an essential requirement for determining the soundness of an instrument it is not enough (Field 2018:779; Ponterotto & Ruckdeschel 2007:1006). In principle, Morrison (2020a), GoForth (2015) and Tavakol and Dennick (2011:54) stress that the concept of reliability presupposes that the items in a scale are unidimensional, where the violation of this assumption would yield an inaccurate measure of reliability. In light of this, researchers opt for standardised surveys, as they have generally been tested for reliability, and utilise constructs that have been subjected to various phases of validation (Trochim 2020b; Trochim 2020e; GoForth 2015). However, although the construct validity of standardised survey instruments has been established during development and repeated use in different contexts, reliability is sensitive to the survey's target population and the local context (Rammstedt et al. 2015:13; Rickards, Magee &

Artino 2012:409; Tavakol & Dennick 2011:53; Ponterotto & Ruckdeschel 2007:1009). Thus, Field (2018:779), Murray (2013:259) and Rickards et al. (2012:409) suggest that reliability evidence should be collected each time the survey is utilised in a specified context, with a particular sample, and for a particular purpose. The discussions related to the reliability and validity of the CSQ, and therefore, follow the succinct deliberations on the external validity of the present study hereunder.

External validity refers to the generalisability of the findings, which is determined by the probability sampling techniques used to ensure that the selected samples are as widely representative of the population as possible in order to make inferences about the whole population being studied (Bhattacherjee 2019:81; Barbour 2014:507; Maxwell & Chmiel; 2014a:540; Silverman 2011:385; Levy & Lemeshow 2008:124). In light of this, stratified random sampling is considered a superior method in enhancing external validity as there is better representation of the population since the population is divided into significant strata according to the particular study from which participants from each group are randomly selected (Cuncic 2020; Cherry 2019; Levy & Lemeshow 2008:124). Consequently, sampling error is reduced, and the external validity of the research results is enhanced (Cherry 2019). Hence, the findings of the present study can be considered to be externally valid, considering the meticulous stratified random sampling methods implemented. The detailed sampling method and representation of the population according to strata have already been discussed in Section 4.3.4.1.

With respect to the CSQ used in the present study, the construct validity of the instrument has been established over time and the instrument has also proven to be internally consistent and reliable in different research studies in numerous organisations across various contexts globally (*see* Downs, DeWine & Greenbaum 2009:62; Okay & Okay 2009:53; Clampitt & Girard 1993:85; Greenbaum, Clampitt & Willihnganz 1988:252). Downs and Hazen (1977) explored, tested, refined and established the underlying constructs of communication satisfaction through rigorous theoretical, empirical and statistical procedures (*see* Greenbaum et al. 1988:2522; Varona 1988:96; Downs & Hazen 1977:63). As such, in order to ensure that the original instrument contained items of both theoretical and empirical significance to the construct under consideration, Downs and Hazen followed a thoroughly inclusive approach and gathered items from a diverse range of sources that included a comprehensive review of communication and organisational literature, other research instruments, pilot studies, and a collection of critical incidents (Allen 2017:300; Panayides 2013:688; Streiner 2003:100; Greenbaum et al. 1988:2522; Varona 1988:96).

Downs and Hazen thus asserted the multidimensionality of communication satisfaction, determining those dimensions through theoretical and empirical research, and validating these dimensions through factor analysis. Zwijze-Koning and De Jong (2007:264) explain that Downs and Hazen (1977) originally found eight dimensions, which Crino and White (1981) subsequently corroborated. Moreover, Greenbaum et al. (1988:2522) and Varona (1988:96) explain that Downs and Hazen (1977) applied both the convergent and the discriminant validity tests to the CSQ to determine that items unrelated to each underlying construct of measurement were eliminated and items related to each underlying construct of measurement were retained, all of which affirm the construct validity of the instrument and each of the eight dimensions of measurement. The factor loadings can be perused in Downs and Hazen's (1977:72) original publication where they assert that "the results from several factor analyses in different organizations [sic] indicate a great amount of stability among the factors."

Moreover, although the reliability of the CSQ has been established through various studies over time (*see* Sharma 2015; Zwijze-Koning & De Jong 2015; Ramirez 2012; Okay & Okay 2009; Downs & Hazen 1977:69), as has been stated earlier, reliability assessment is susceptible to population dynamics (Bhattacherjee 2019:119; Taber 2018:1274; Rammstedt et al. 2015:13; Rickards et al. 2012:409). Therefore, the assessment of the reliability of the scales was also carried out for the present study, through the evaluation of internal consistency. Morrison (2020a), Field (2018:854), Moussa (2016:4), GoForth (2015) and Panayides (2013:695) explain that the assessment of internal consistency involves administering a measuring instrument to a single sample of respondents on a single occasion to judge how consistent the results are for different items for each construct within the measure by means of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α).

Cronbach's alpha is the most common statistical measure used to determine the internal consistency of a measuring instrument and is essentially a function of the number of items in a scale, the average covariance between pairs of items, and the variance of the total score and is expressed as a number between 0 and 1 (Trochim 2020e; Tavakol & Dennick 2011:53; Ponterotto & Ruckdeschel 2007:1001; Reynaldo & Santos 1999:2; Cronbach 1951:320). Associations between all of the items in a scale will be observed when they are consistently measuring the construct of interest. A scale is considered to be reliable when the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.70 or larger as measures with high alpha scores have smaller measurement error and, by implication, yield enhanced statistical power (Gliem & Gliem 2003:84; Nunnaly 1978:245). Fundamentally this means that respondents who opt for high values on the scale for one item in a specific scale are also likely to opt for high

values for the others. Likewise, respondents who choose low scores for one item also tend to choose low scores for the remaining items (Murray 2013:259). Thus, in general, knowing the score for one item would enable one to predict, with some degree of accuracy, the possible scores for the other items in a particular scale.

Morrision (2020a) and Tavakol and Dennick (2011:54) further explain that, when the reliability test yields a low alpha score ($\alpha<0.7$), this could be an indication of insufficient items in a scale, heterogeneous constructs, or weak correlation among items. In such a case, in order to enhance the alpha score, Murray (2013:259) suggests adding more related items to a measurement scale and modifying or eliminating items that exhibit insufficient correlation. However, Ponterotto and Ruckdeschel (2007:1009) point out that as "reliability is inversely related to measurement error and directly related to validity limits, researchers should naturally attempt to select measures with higher reliability up to a point". Therefore, Taber (2018:1286) asserts that alpha values ought to preferably be limited to an alpha score of 0.90, due to exceedingly high alpha scores (especially when $\alpha>0.95$). This may allude to redundancy among items in a scale.

Nevertheless, Javali, Gudaganavar and Raj (2011:2) and Yurdugül (2008:397) contend that these values ought to be interpreted with caution when sample sizes are inadequate and should not be seen as absolute thresholds. Sample size, as Bujang, Omar and Baharum (2018:86), Tavakol and Dennick (2011:54), Knapp (2009:65) and Ponterotto and Ruckdeschel (2007:1002) note, also influences internal consistency scores as the reliability score is directly corelated to the standard deviation of a sample's scores. Thus, the larger the standard deviation of scores, the larger the coefficient alpha for that sample. Hence, though sample size is not the fundamental variable when assessing the adequacy of coefficient alpha, it influences the accuracy of a sample's reliability estimates relative to population estimates (Morrison 2020a; Ponterotto & Ruckdeschel 2007:1001; Nunnally 1978:246). Therefore, when using Likert-type attitude measures, sample sizes of at least 300 are recommended as yielding more precise estimates of population reliability (Tavakol & Dennick 2011:54). Smaller sample sizes may, as Bujang et al. (2018:98) and Ponterotto and Ruckdeschel (2007:1001) point out, nevertheless be sufficient when representative stratified sampling is carried out.

It is also important to note that Cronbach's alpha is responsive to dimensionality and scale length as adding more unique items to a scale can reduce measurement error. Hence, Bhattacherjee (2019:118), Murray (2013:259), Rickards et al. (2012:409) and Tavakol and Dennick (2011:54)

advise survey developers to find the appropriate survey length that will enhance internal reliability, while at the same time, ensure that the survey is not too long so as to cause to respondent fatigue that would lead to response errors. Nevertheless, although the alpha coefficient determines the extent to which multiple Likert-items in a scale are correlated with one another, it does not determine the dimensionality of the scales used (as has been stated earlier) (Morrison 2020a). In order to check for dimensionality, Bhattacherjee (2019:132) and Panayides (2013:687) recommend that evidence of factor analysis during survey development be provided, as it is possible to produce a high alpha coefficient even if there are multiple underlying dimensions (which, for this study, has already been provided and explained earlier in this section 4.3.4.4) Therefore, in view of the arguments put forth up to this point, it can be deduced that, in evaluating the internal consistency for a specific scale or subscale, the value of the reliability coefficient ought to be viewed in relation to the number of items in the scale and the sample size on which the coefficient was computed.

In terms of the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to determine the reliability of the scales used for each of the eight dimensions of the CSQ to evaluate how consistently multiple items within the different scales and subscales in the survey assess the same underlying construct. The criteria for gauging the internal consistency for this study are provided in Table 4.8 below.

Table 4. 8: Internal consistency criteria for this study

Criteria for a reliable scale	
Cronbach's alpha	≥.70 but <0.95
Range of corrected item-total correlations	≥ 0.50
Range of Cronbach's alpha's if item deleted	Deleting any item would improve reliability substantially (α score increases within the acceptable range stated above)

The reliability figures are presented in two ways, namely, **scale statistics** and **item-total statistics**. Scale statistics provide information about the scales within the entire questionnaire, while the item-total statistics provide information about the adequacy of items within each scale and whether any items need to be excluded from the measurement scales. The scale statistics are provided in Table 4.9 below, while the item-total statistics are presented in Tables 4.10 – 4.25 in Addendum G.

Table 4.9: Reliability coefficients for communication satisfaction dimensions

Variable	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Scale statistics			Listwise deletion				
			Mean	Variance	Standard deviation	Valid		Excluded		Total
						N	%	N	%	N = 100%
Communication climate	5	0.873	18.68	43.244	6.576	299	95.2%	15	4.8%	314
Horizontal and informal communication	5	0.838	17.81	34.660	5.887	293	93.3%	21	6.7%	314
*Subordinate communication	5	0.913	17.06	34.461	5.870	115	36.6%	199	63.4%	314
Organisational (corporate) perspective	5	0.846	18.65	36.884	6.073	297	94.6%	17	5.4%	314
Organisational integration	5	0.848	16.65	38.410	6.198	299	95.2%	15	4.8%	314
Media quality	5	0.848	17.12	40.215	6.342	303	96.5%	11	3.5%	314
Communication with superiors	5	0.907	14.90	49.319	7.023	298	94.9%	16	5.1%	314
Personal feedback	5	0.899	19.63	50.274	7.090	294	93.6	20	6.4%	314

The output in Table 4.9 provides the statistics for each of the eight communication satisfaction constructs in the CSQ. A Listwise deletion for all items was used to exclude cases with missing and/or incomplete data in the reliability measure. Grace-Martin (2020a; 2020b) and Bartlett (2013) clarify that the listwise deletion technique allows for analysis of complete cases in the dataset/s. This technique is appropriate if the percentage of excluded cases is small and if the deletions have a minimal effect on randomness. In the case of the present study, as can be seen from the outputs in Table 6.9, the deletions account for between 3.5% and 6.7% of the exclusions, which indicate negligible loss in statistical power and ratifies the validity of the complete case reliability analysis estimations. The high percentage of excluded cases for the "subordinate communication" variable is due to the fact that the questions in this section were only meant for managers, thus excluding other cases by default, and not through error, hence, not affecting statistical power.

In terms of the internal consistency approximations, the alpha coefficient for the five items for each of the constructs ranged from $\alpha = 0.838$ to $\alpha = 0.913$ suggesting that the scales used in the CSQ have high internal consistency. The "communication with superiors" and the "subordinate communication" constructs reach the upper limits of the reliability estimate (0.907 and 0.913 respectively), while the rest of the constructs present alpha values in the preferred mid-high range of reliability estimation (0.838-0.899). The "subordinate communication" construct possibly shows a higher alpha score due to the small sample size (N=115 – 36.6% of the total sample) in comparison to the other variables, as this question was directed at managers only. These estimations do not reach the extreme values of 0.95 that are not favoured (*see* Taber 2018; Ponterotto & Ruckdeschel 2007). This indicates that the items in these scales contribute to the scales' diversity and do not indicate redundancy amongst items. Therefore, overall, the reliability statistics indicate that all items in this questionnaire positively contribute to the internal consistency of the questionnaire.

The item-total statistics provide the most important reliability estimations for the measurement scales used in a questionnaire that assist survey developers in improving these scales by providing information about poor items that should preferably be eliminated (Bhattacherjee 2019:119; Flom 2017; Pope 2009; Gliem & Gliem 2003:86). The item total correlation statistics provide information about the association between a single item and the total scale score without that item (Flom 2017). This data also establishes whether an item in a scale is inconsistent with the averaged estimates of the other items in the same scale to determine whether it can be discarded (Hajjar 2018:35; Flom 2017). Hence, a small item-total correlation value (<0.5) provides empirical evidence that the item is

not measuring the same construct measured by the other items included and, therefore, may be discarded.

The item-total reliability statistics of each of the eight scales used in the CSQ are presented in Addendum G. The "**corrected item-total correlation**" and the "**Cronbach's alpha if item deleted**" columns are the two columns of interest for Tables 4.10 - 4.25 in the said Addendum. The former column provides information about the level of correlation between each item and the overall summated score for the scale without the said item, thereby providing the reliability score of the scale if the individual item is removed therefrom. The correlations presented in all eight scales range between 0.531 and 0.848 (> 0.5). This means that there is a strong, positive correlation between the scores for each item and the combined score of the remaining four items in each scale, thus indicating that no items should be discarded from the test scales.

The latter column provides a predicted alpha score for each item in the scale if the particular item is removed. If the alpha value decreases if the item is deleted, then it indicates that the item is crucial for the stability of the scale and should remain (Hajjar 2018:35; Piedmont 2014:143; Gliem & Gliem 2003:86). However, if the alpha value increases after the item is deleted, if would indicate that the item is not related to the scale of measure and ought to be deleted to increase the reliability of the questionnaire (Flom 2017). According to these results, the alpha scores, if the item is deleted, indicate that the removal of any of the items in the eight measurement scales would generally lead to a slight decrease in the value of the alpha coefficient, which indicates that the items in each of the scales add to the reliability of the scales. Hence, no items ought to be removed from the scales.

Having discussed the qualitative and quantitative elements of this research, the following section outlines the ethical considerations of the study.

4.4 RESEARCH ETHICS

Research ethics embodies the scientific code of morality and the guidelines for humane research practices in social research (NESH 2016:5; Buchanan & Bryman 2007:483). Moreover, the importance of improving the ethical regulation of organisational research, as applicable to this study, to ensure credible and trustworthy findings, McLeod, Payne and Evert (2016:429), Frechtling and Boo (2012:150) and Cassell (2011:512) argue, cannot be underestimated, due to the implications this has on core decisions made and the associated outcomes of these decisions for the organisation

and its internal and external stakeholders. The recognised norms for ethical research conduct that form the basis of the guidelines include social responsibility, academic integrity, sound scientific practice and the protection of research participants (European Commission 2018:11; Bell & Bryman 2007). Jones (2014:64) and Cassell (2011:510) add that transparency in research reporting and the protection of the research participant and their rights to voluntary withdrawal from the study, confidentiality and anonymity constitute some of the core ethical mandates of research. NESH (2016:23), Resnik (2015) and Williams (2011:6) explain that it is the responsibility of the researcher to brief research participants on the research and the implications of participation in the study. This right of voluntary and informed participation is secured through participants' informed consent to participate in the study (see Addenda D and E for the informed consent forms for both segments of this study). Informed consent forms ideally contain background information about the study, participants' right to confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation in and withdrawal from the study (European Commission 2018:13). So as to ensure that researchers adhere to the guidelines of ethical conduct, research that involves human participants are generally subject to scrutiny and approval from institutional ethics review committees (Bhattacherjee 2019:284; European Commission 2018:11; Bell & Wray-Bliss 2011:80). The ethics review committees have structured policies and procedures in place to ensure proper ethical review, implementation and accountability of research.

In this respect, this study followed the guidelines, principles, and policies of ethical research and was reviewed by the ethical review board, College of Human Sciences REC, at the University of South Africa (UNISA)(see Addendum B for the ethical clearance certificate). As stipulated in the discussion of the research design in Section 6.3, the core elements of ethical conduct (as outlined above) were diligently adhered to for the qualitative and quantitative segments of the study. Every endeavour was made to ensure the protection of the participants from harm, safeguarding their anonymity, confidentiality and their right of voluntary withdrawal from the study, ensuring transparent research processes, and making sure that the data is securely stored, where printed surveys are stored in a locked cabinet and the recordings and transcriptions of the interviews are stored in a password-protected cloud storage facility (refer to Section 4.3 for a detailed discussion of the research design and the measures taken to ensure adherence to the core elements of ethical research at each phase of the research process). This section cover the adherence to voluntary participation, informed consent, the rationale for the inclusion of selected participants, as well as detailed descriptions of the research approach, design, collection and analysis of data. Data collected for this study, particularly the sensitive qualitative transcripts and survey responses related to institutional stability

during the 2017 crisis, were handled with strict protocols. While all identifying information (names, specific job titles, contact details) was immediately anonymised and irreversibly separated from the research data upon transcription, the final, anonymised data set will be retained securely for a period of three (3) years following the official submission of the thesis, as mandated by the University's research policy. A formal plan for the secure destruction of all data will be implemented upon expiration of the retention period.

An explanation of the interview process and participants' right of voluntary participation and confidentiality were then communicated, before providing informed consent forms (see Addendum D) to participants. Shahnazarian, Hagemann and Rose (2017:3) indicate, "Voluntary informed consent and the consenting process is about the protection and respect for research subjects and is a prerequisite for a subject's participation in research." Informed consent is a process that clarifies the research focus, potential risks and benefits of participation in the study, as well as the voluntary agreement of participants to be involved in a study (DeJonckheere & Vaughn 2019:4; Bryman 2016:31; Miller & Boulton 2007:2199). Moreover, Salmon (2017:113), Shahnazarian et al. (2017:5) and Terre Blanche et al. (2008:292) explain that the informed consent process ought to assure participants of their prerogative to confidentiality and anonymity, as well as the liberty to cease participation in the study at any time without coercion. In the interest of anonymity, participants in this study preferred to use pseudonyms, in the form of numerical identifiers, when signing the consent forms.

Once informed consent was obtained, permission to use a voice recording for the interviews were sought before conducting the interviews. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019:6), Verhoeven (2011:221) and Terre Blanche et al. (2008:298) point out that securing the consent of participants before recording the conversations in an interviewee setting establishes rapport between the researcher and the research participants. In this respect, of the twenty interviewees in this study, eighteen agreed to the interviews being voice-recorded. The remaining two participants consented to the researcher only taking down notes during the interview session. The final section that will be discussed in this chapter is the limitations of the study.

4.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This section summarises the most critical limitations regarding the study's temporal and contextual scope, with a specific focus on the period following the 2016 elections. The empirical findings of this

study are strictly limited by time and context. The results are confined to the institutional conditions and employee perceptions present during the acute Political-Administrative (P-A) disruption period, which prevents their generalisation to eThekwini Municipality's functioning outside of this specific crisis window. Furthermore, although employee eligibility began immediately post the 2016 local government elections to capture initial instability, the empirical findings cannot be broadly applied to other municipal or public sector organisations, as their distinct institutional environments and P-A dynamics introduce variables not accounted for in this focused analysis.

Furthermore, limitations related to the theoretical boundaries need to be stated as the findings are interpreted within these parameters. Although various aspects of the study could be applicable to organisations in general, the focus of this study is on public sector organisations only, and particularly within the South African context. Therefore, only aspects that relate to the way in which public organisations function, their contextual variables, structural features, and the related influences these have on internal communication satisfaction have been considered. Moreover, the empirical part of the study is restricted to a single South African municipality and cannot be fully generalised to other local government organisations. Moreover, the central focus of this study is on the communication between the organisation and its employees, specifically, as employees are at the forefront of service delivery in local government and require effective internal communication to ensure optimal productivity and organisational output. Therefore, all discussions and arguments eventually incline towards internal communication. Additionally, only the aspects (policies, theories, concepts) applicable to the bureaucratic structuration of public organisations that have an impact on internal communication practices that pertain to the focus of this study have been delineated and discussed.

Finally, although other environmental factors could have an impact on internal communication processes in public organisations, the focus of this study is particularly on the regulative context that influences the structuration of these organisations. It is these regulative forces that form the basis of all other institutional pillars evident in public organisations, which are inadvertently discussed as such. In terms of methodological limitations, although meticulous sampling strategies were employed, access to the sampling frames for each cluster in the municipality would have enhanced the sampling precision of the quantitative segment of this study. However, this was not possible, due to the confidentiality and anonymity of employee information prescribed by the Protection of Personal Information (PoPI) Act (Workpool 2016). Furthermore, the stratification of samples according to management levels was only identified after data collection, which limited the size of these sub-

strata and consequent inclusion in the interpretation of findings, even when statistically significant results were observed. As explained in Section 4.3.4.1, the interest in this level of stratification came to the fore during the qualitative phase of the study, which also revealed the complex organisational structuration of the municipality, which varies according to the needs and requirements of each cluster and the units therein. Nonetheless, this level of stratification can be considered for future studies. Finally, the complexity of the study and the challenges associated with implementing the research design impacted the time frames of the study, which need to be considered in future studies.

4.6 SUMMARY

Situated within the post-2016 municipal elections period, this chapter outlined the study's overall research approach, beginning with an overview of the research paradigm. The paradigmatic approach of this study is pragmatic-interpretivism. It was argued that pragmatic-interpretivism, which adopts an interpretivist ontological stance and a pragmatic epistemological stance, provides a framework to unpack some of the complexities of organisational life. As such, an interpretivist ontological stance provides greater breadth and depth of analysis and insight into the organisation as a social construction shaped by multiple perspectives, while the pragmatic epistemological framework underlies the combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies in answering the research questions with a view to understanding the communication experiences of public employees more holistically. Taking this paradigmatic stance, the research design and methodology were presented, systematically discussing the quantitative and qualitative segments of the study, after iterating the research problem, research questions and the methodologies per research question that highlight how the study progresses from the theoretical, conceptual, and contextual aspects to the empirical component of the study in answering the research questions.

The details of the study population and the initial levels of stratification based on clusters in the *eThekwini Municipality* were subsequently presented, and progress to the discussion of the precise methodological approaches utilised in the empirical part of the study. The detailed sampling, data collection, capturing and analysis techniques, as well as the integrity in terms of dependability (reliability), credibility (validity), transferability (external validity) and the overall methodological theoretical rigour of each segment of the study (qualitative and quantitative) were discussed in Sections 4.3.3 and 4.3.4 respectively, which included discussions on and justifications of the coding process used for the qualitative study and the statistical analysis techniques utilised for the

quantitative segment. As research is not free from shortcomings, the limitations of this study were put forth after discussing this study's adherence to the core principles of ethical research, even though some of these aspects were clarified within the discussion presented in Section 4.4. This chapter presents a pertinent link to the next chapter that provides the presentation of the integrated findings from the qualitative and quantitative elements of the study.

CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE INTEGRATED RESEARCH RESULTS AND FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 gave a detailed discussion of the methodology followed in the empirical part of this study. This chapter, therefore, focuses on answering research questions 1.4, 2.3, and 3.3 that cover the empirical component of this study, namely:

Macro-level: Institutional Context

Sub-problem 1

RQ 1.4: What bearing did the institutional context have on how internal communication was managed in *eThekwini Municipality* during the post-2016 municipal elections disruption (March–September 2017)?

Meso-level: Organisational Culture

Sub-problem 2

RQ 2.3: What bearing does the organisational culture have on how internal communication is managed in eThekwini Municipality during the post-2016 municipal elections disruption (March–September 2017)?

Micro-level: Internal Communication and Satisfaction

Sub-Problem 3

RQ 3.3: What was the level of satisfaction of employees at the eThekwini Municipality with its internal communication during the post-2016 municipal elections disruption (March–September 2017)?

Chapter 5 presents a retrospective analysis of employee experiences during the post-2016 period, presenting the integrated results and findings based on the eight constructs of communication satisfaction. Reference to “findings” in the combined interpretation and conclusions encapsulates both qualitative and quantitative data throughout the thesis. Specific demographic details relevant to this study are presented initially, before discussing the findings of the study. The research findings presented in this chapter are based on a thorough analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. The analysis of data was done separately initially for each method and was thereafter integrated to

present the integrated findings according to the strata and sub-groupings identified and discussed in Chapter 4. Qualitative analyses were thus used to expand on the results of the quantitative data, giving the findings more depth. Although the data collection and analysis for the qualitative and quantitative segments were done separately, the presentation and discussion of the quantitative and qualitative data analysis are presented concurrently in the section below to provide a coherent and holistic understanding of the data.

5.2 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The following discussion presents and interprets qualitative findings and quantitative results simultaneously as the combination of approaches provides a more comprehensive overview of the research problem at hand.

For the quantitative data, the tables and figures report on the results of the descriptive and inferential statistics undertaken to report the responses of all the items in the questionnaire (refer to Addendum E for the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ). Significant results are indicated in bold print in the different tables. Statistical analyses were then augmented with the thematically analysed interview data (interview transcripts can be made available on request, as these are too large to attach). For ease of reference, only statistically significant results are reported on and discussed in the subsequent sections (all statistical results can be made available on request). Moreover, as discussed at length in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.4.3, although the findings report on the summated scores of constructs in accordance with the logic of Likert scaling, descriptive statistics per item within each construct have also been derived to identify areas of variance in opinions within a scale that could be explored for further scale development in future studies. This data can be made available on request.

As for the qualitative data, the coding matrices were provided in Chapter 4 and will be discussed below in the combined presentation and analysis. The subsequent section begins with the demographic data of the quantitative and qualitative samples.

5.2.1 Demographics

Only the demographic details of the survey respondents that were relevant to this study are indicated below, the most important being the distribution of respondents across clusters in the municipality.

Of peripheral significance to this study are the educational levels as well as the age distribution of respondents, which are, nonetheless, highlighted below. The educational levels and age distribution of employees do not provide insight into the institutional context, while the management levels do, as managers are at the forefront of the institutional context. As the sample of qualitative data is small (N=20), in the interest of maintaining the anonymity of participants, specific demographic details of the interview participants cannot be revealed.

5.2.1.1 Distribution of respondents across clusters



Figure 5. 1: Distribution of respondents per cluster

There are nine clusters across the municipality, varying in size and functions, and respondents were selected across all clusters. Respondents represent all strata in this respect as depicted in Figure 5.1. Each cluster is made of different units of varying sizes depending on the requirements of the services to be delivered, as explained in Chapter 4. A total of 314 surveys were analysed after cleaning of data. These were representative of all nine clusters of the municipality as outlined in Table 5.1 below. The further stratification according to management level, as discussed in the research design in Chapter 4, is outlined in Table 5.2. It can be seen from the data below that of the 314 responses received, 40 respondents (12.7%) did not specify a management level, while 108 respondents (34.4%) belong to some management level (upper, middle, lower, ground level management/supervisory), and 166 respondents (53%) are not part of any form of management. As stated in Chapter 4, in the discussion of the research design and sampling, the complex municipal structure contains many levels of management within clusters and units. This is a key feature of administrative bureaucracies as hierarchy, structure, and the specialisation of tasks are elements of the ideal type, that persist in the public sector due to the emphasis on technical efficiency and rational

precision, simplifying the complex task of executing government policy (Boddy-Evans 2020; Shafritz & Hyde 2017:69; DeHart-Davis, Davis, & Mohr 2014:850; Lynn 2012:19; Peters & Pierre 2012:2). Nonetheless, these features also create complex lines of command and control. Therefore, the proportion of managers is fairly high. This is a limitation that needs to be addressed in future studies.

Table 5. 1: Distributions per cluster

Level	Count	%
Office of The City Manager	21	6.7%
City Managers Operations Office	6	1.9%
Community and Emergency Services	56	17.8%
Corporate and Human Resources	47	15.0%
Economic Development and Planning	45	14.3%
Finance	30	9.6%
Governance and International Relations	16	5.1%
Human Settlement, Engineering Service, And Transport	23	7.3%
Trading Services	70	22.3%
Total	**314**	**100.00%**

Table 5. 2: Distributions according to management level per cluster

Level	Management	Non-management	Unspecified level management level	Totals
Office of the City Manager	1	17	3	21
City Manager's Operations Office	2	4		6
Community and Emergency Services	15	26	15	56
Corporate and Human Resources	14	22	11	47
Economic Development and Planning	19	20	6	45
Finance	11	17	2	30
Governance and International Relations	3	13		16
Human Settlement Engineering Service and Transport	5	18		23
Trading Services	38	29	3	70
Total	108	166	40	**314**

5.2.1.2 Age distribution

Of the 314 respondents, 37 did not indicate their age group. Nonetheless, the data reveal that 36% of respondents belong to the 30-39 years age group, while 26% make up the 40-49 age category. The 21-29 and the 50-59 age categories each comprised 18% of the population. Only 2% of the sample was 60 years and older. Although this data indicates that respondents were predominantly from younger age groups (i.e., below 39), the data reveal views from respondents of varying ages. These categories of data stratification can be explored in future studies.

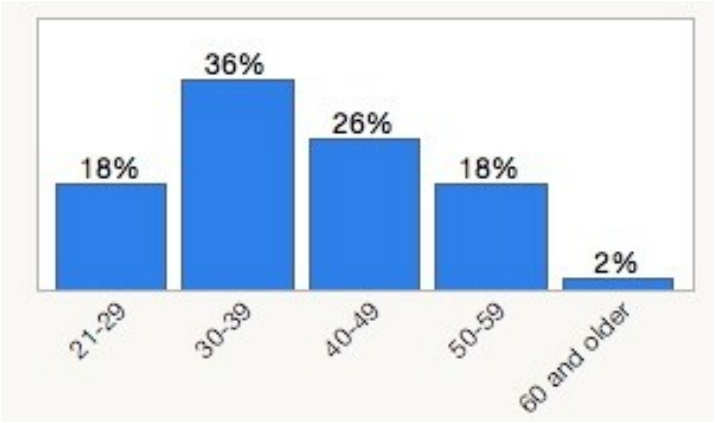


Table 5. 3: Age distribution of respondents

The frequency distributions are outlined in the table below.

Table 5. 4: Age distribution of respondents

Level	Count	%
21-29	50	18.1%
30-39	100	36.1%
40-49	72	25.9%
50-59	50	18.1%
60 and older	5	1.8%
Total	**277**	**100%**
N Missing	37	

5.2.1.3 Education levels of respondents

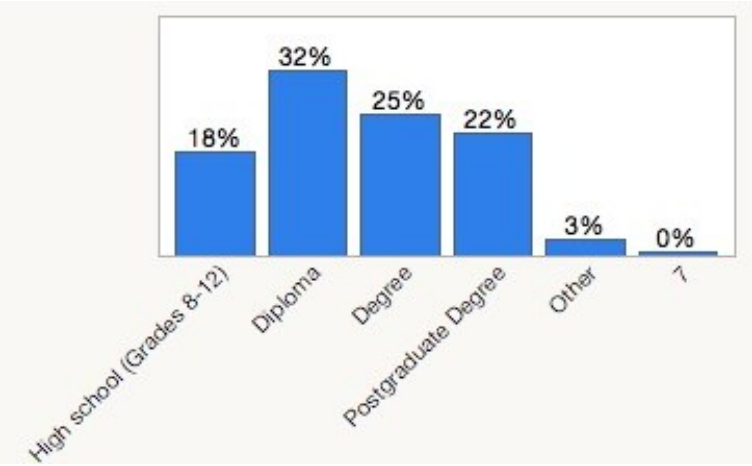


Figure 5. 2: Education level of respondents

The data reveal that 18% of respondents have completed some level of higher education after grade eight, while 32% have a diploma. A further 25% have an undergraduate degree, and 22% have a postgraduate degree, while 3% of the respondents stated other types of qualifications. The data thus indicate that respondents have varying levels of qualifications, which denotes views from respondents with different education levels. 49 respondents did not indicate their educational level, which could indicate their need for confidentiality and anonymity that could likely be compromised by revealing their education levels. This is another category of data stratification that can be explored in future studies.

Table 5. 5: Education level of respondents

Level	Count	%
High school (Grades 8-12)	48	18.1%
Diploma	86	32.5%
Degree	66	24.9%
Postgraduate Degree	57	21.5%
Other	7	2.6%
7	1	0.4%
Total	**265**	**100%**
N Missing	49	

5.2.1.4 Job level of respondents

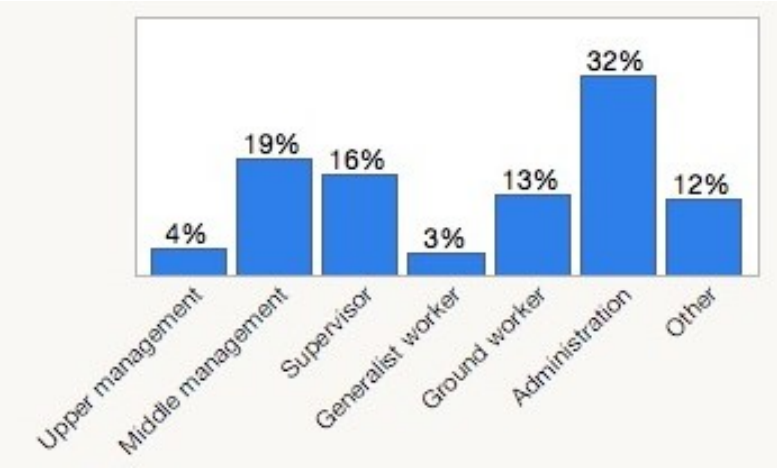


Figure 5. 3: Job level of respondents

The data reveal that 32% of respondents work in administrative positions, while 13% are groundworkers, 3% are generalist workers, and 12% have other job-level descriptors that have not been listed in the questionnaire. The remaining 42% of respondents belong to differing levels of management, namely, upper management (4%), middle management (19%), and supervisory level (16%). The data thus reveals the diversity of positions and job levels in a large bureaucratic organisation. Nonetheless, 51 respondents did not indicate their job level, which again could be an indication that respondents want to maintain anonymity by keeping personal information confidential.

Table 5. 6: Job level of respondents

Level	Count	%
Upper management	11	4.2%
Middle management	49	18.6%
Supervisor	43	16.3%
Generalist worker	9	3.4%
Groundworker	34	13.0%
Administration	85	32.3%
Other	32	12.2%
Total	**263**	**100%**
Missing	51	

5.2.2 Overall communication satisfaction: The Bearing of the P-A Disruption on Employee Sentiment

Communication satisfaction is often considered the "sum" of an individual's satisfaction with these dimensions. These factors include communication climate, horizontal and informal communication, subordinate communication, organisational (corporate) perspective, media quality, organisational integration, superior communication, and personal feedback. Identifying the level of communication satisfaction of public service employees from this stance can provide an overview of the general levels of fulfilment with their communication experiences, as well as an indication of contentment with each of the eight factors delineated in the CSQ. This would indicate the perceptions of employees to the relational and functional aspects of communication satisfaction within an administrative bureaucracy, which can be assessed in relation to the structure, design, and culture of an as has been argued thus far (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Sharma 2015:53; Varona 1996:3; Clampitt & Girard 1993:8; Clampitt & Downs 1987:5). The following section provides an analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data in this regard to understand the perceptions of employees' overall communication satisfaction.

Overall communication satisfaction considers the mean score of all eight constructs. A mean score of 4.45 demonstrates that the overall communication satisfaction at *eThekwini Municipality* leans to towards slight dissatisfaction (M>4). The standard deviation from the mean indicates that most measurements fall within 1.12 points above and below the mean value, which indicates that most measures fall in the dissatisfied or slightly satisfied categories.

Table 5. 7: Organisation-wide communication satisfaction – statistical summary

Mean	4.4547733
Std Dev	1.1289886
Std Err Mean	0.0637125
Upper 95% Mean	4.5801322
Lower 95% Mean	4.3294143
N	314
Skewness	-0.55851
Kurtosis	0.0469121

Further testing through the one-way ANOVA was conducted to identify if the means showed statistically significant differences across clusters for overall communication satisfaction. Cohen's f^2 measure was used to determine the practical significance, where the F-test revealed statistically significant results. Table 5.8 reports on the statistical and practical significance of overall communication satisfaction after running the one-way ANOVA test and applying Cohen's f^2 measure to indicate the magnitude of the differences between means for overall communication satisfaction across clusters.

Table 5. 8: Statistical and practical significance for overall communication satisfaction across clusters

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio	Prob > F	Cohen's f^2	Effect size
				Statistical Significance	Statistical significance	Practical significance	
CLUSTER	8	37.56808	4.69601	3.9633	0.0002*	0.32	medium
Error	305	361.38647	1.18487				
C. Total	313	398.95454					

The one-way ANOVA returned a statistically significant result (i.e., the ANOVA's F-ratio is high [i.e., ≥ 1] and the p-value is small [i.e., < 0.05], which indicates that the difference in means is significant and it can be deduced that at least two group means differ. As can be seen from Table 5.8 above, a high statistical significance for overall communication satisfaction was revealed from the F-test, with a p-value of 0.0002 and an F-ratio of 3.9633. Moreover, Cohen's f^2 effect size measure revealed a medium practically significant difference between the means across clusters, indicating that there is a notable difference in employees' satisfaction with the overall communication at *eThekwini Municipality*. In other words, the results from the ANOVA indicated that the means were not equal, but it did not reveal which means were different from which other means. Therefore, the post-hoc t-tests were used to conduct pairwise comparisons to identify which means differed from each other.

Table 5. 9: Pairwise comparisons between means for overall communication satisfaction across clusters

Level	Number	Mean (M)	Std Dev	Std Err Mean	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Community and Emergency Services	**56**	**4.16884**	**1.29880**	**0.17356**	**3.8210**	**4.5167**
Corporate and HR	47	4.82860	1.04868	0.15297	4.5207	5.1365
Economic Dev and Planning	45	4.44831	1.00296	0.14951	4.1470	4.7496
Finance	**30**	**3.67667**	**1.26943**	0.23177	3.2027	4.1507
Governance and Int Relations	**16**	**4.12411**	**1.44210**	**0.36052**	**3.3557**	**4.8925**
Human Settlement Eng Serv Transport	23	4.65331	0.81247	0.16941	4.3020	5.0046
Man Operations Office	**6**	**4.88095**	**0.72897**	**0.29760**	**4.1159**	**5.6460**
Office City Manager	21	4.66156	1.00625	0.21958	4.2035	5.1196
Trading Services	70	4.68194	0.92001	0.10996	4.4626	4.9013

Table 5. 10: Connecting letters report for the difference between means: overall communication satisfaction

Level			Mean
Man Operations Office	A	B	4.8809524
Corporate and HR	**A**		**4.8285968**
Trading Services	**A**		**4.6819388**
Office City Manager	**A**		**4.6615646**
Human Settlement Eng Serv Transport	**A**		**4.6533126**
Economic Dev and Planning	A	B	4.4483069
Community and Emergency Services	A	B	4.1688350
Governance and Int Relations	A	B	4.1241071
Finance		**B**	**3.6766667**

***[Levels not connected by the same letter are significantly different]**

While Table 5.9 reports on the differences between means among the clusters for overall communication satisfaction, Table 5.10 presents the connecting letters report, which illustrates significant and non-significant comparisons with connecting letters. Letters connected with the same or overlapping letter/s show no significant difference, whereas levels displaying different letters show significant differences. Scrutinising Tables 5.9 and 5.10, it can be seen that post-hoc t-tests revealed statistically significant differences in satisfaction, with overall communication between several clusters. Four clusters (Corporate and HR, Trading Services, Office of the City Manager and Human

Settlement) showed significant differences from the Finance cluster, which can be seen in both Tables 7.8 and 7.9. Of particular interest is the Finance cluster (M = 3.68), which is very closely aligned to the middlemost scale of 4 (M<4) in the CSQ when rounded off, indicating neutrality, but leaning more towards the slightly satisfied scale. The four clusters (Corporate and HR, Trading Services, Office of the City Manager and Human Settlement) that significantly differ from the Finance cluster, lean towards slight dissatisfaction. The City Manager's operations office (M = 4.88) also leans more towards the slightly dissatisfied scale when rounded off (M>4), while the rest of the clusters lean more closely towards neutrality (M = 4). Of all the clusters, the results reveal that the Corporate and HR and the City Manager's Operations office lean towards greater dissatisfaction in comparison to the other clusters. These differences are depicted in the diamond plot from SAS JMP Figure 5.4 below.

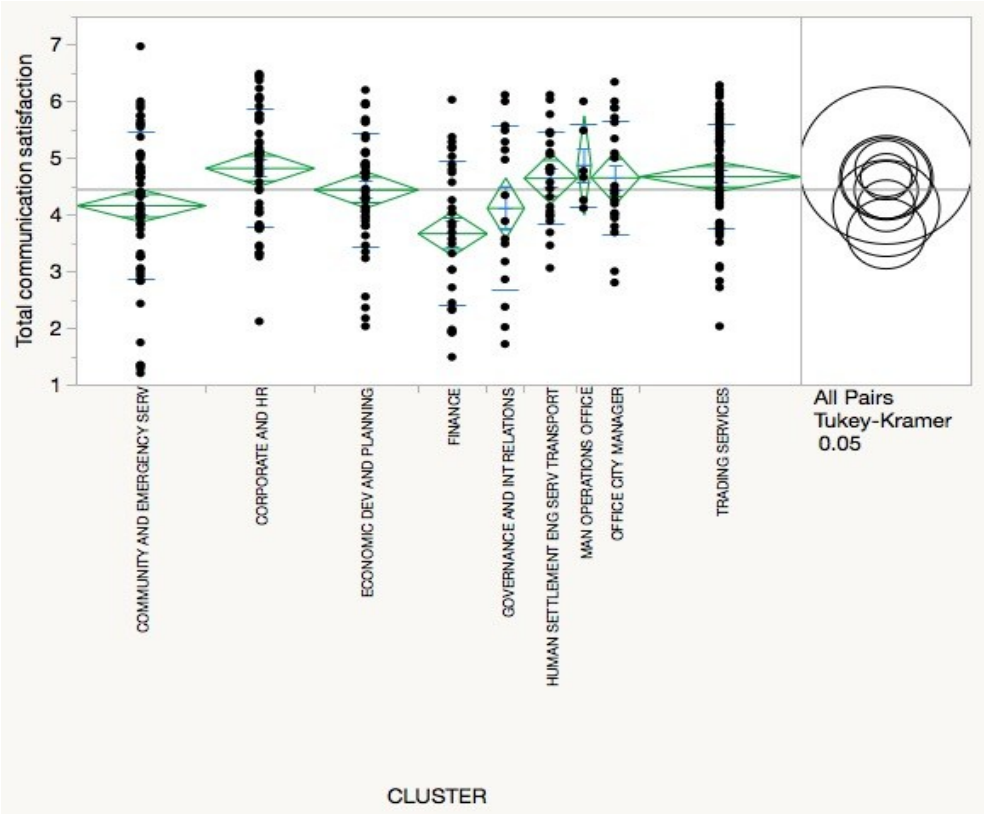


Figure 5. 4: Overall communication satisfaction per cluster showing a statistical significance between means

The descriptive statistics per cluster according to management levels in terms of overall communication satisfaction have been analysed and can be made available on request. Although this data does not require elaboration in the findings as they do not directly address the research

questions, these descriptive statistics form the basis of all inferential statistical procedures (which are the crux of the analysis of the present study) performed subsequently.

Respondents (cited verbatim throughout) thus indicated varying levels of communication satisfaction, where one construct or the other was singled out as a determining factor for overall communication satisfaction within clusters. These findings are further explored in the presentation of findings for each construct in the subsequent sections of this chapter. Some of the key issues related to communication satisfaction identified during the qualitative data analysis are highlighted below. Interviewees referred to communication satisfaction in terms of the communication channels used. None of the interviews described communication satisfaction in terms of a combination of elements. Dissatisfaction with a channel of communication was viewed as dissatisfaction with the overall internal communication. Thus, the interview data in relation to this question revealed that although there are many media and channels available for internal communication at the municipality, many managers lean on preferred modes of communication, such as email and staff meetings:

> *"For me it would be, we have the meetings with the head but I don't think at the moment they that effective perhaps if we could have a structured forum well I'm saying forum for the lack of a better word where I come from is, we used to have what we call a GM forum, the General Manager of the whole organisation will meet with everybody the whole staff and I find that doing that it helps everybody even the people at the lowest level they can be effected."*

Information is not understood:

> *"I think, also, also what's important, what I feel that I will be more satisfied is when it is written in a manner that I will be able to understand. I think some people they issue of jargons and all that because I think it's good government, we're into that, a lot of that, what helps."*

> *"I think what we normally said, knowing what's going on within the Council. I think is one important thing for everyone in the department, knowing what's going on. I think it's critical and then also it's a level of details as well, because sometimes you find that the information is skimpy then you try, what is this thing all about, you know, sometimes, it's too long, you know we don't have time to read pages, pages and pages, you know, you have success to a point a well-read document, it's a well-read document or any other communication that can be yours."*

Additionally, the channels and mediums of communication are not used effectively in disseminating information:

> *"The information there is available you have to look for it. It's not the information you will just get and say, oh, here it is, you'll get it in your intranet. If you search for it and you know how to search for it."*

The politically charged environment of the municipality leads to lower levels of communication satisfaction. This category is linked to the institutional positioning of the municipality that has a likely bearing on the organisational culture within *eThekwini Municipality*. In this respect, when one interviewee was asked to describe communication satisfaction within the municipality, and their cluster and unit generically, the participant mentioned the politically charged environment and its influence on internal communication satisfaction:

> *"Not happy at all, because again, everything is politically driven. You know, if you go and speak to the staff, which is our responsibility to meet and speak to the staff and so forth, you find that they want to hear more from the union than they want to hear from management. So, we've tendered to be, to walk in this bureaucracy and this political atmosphere."*

In light of the influence of organisational culture that is likely constituted from preconceived notions that influence the internal communication between superiors and subordinates, another interviewee mentioned that:

> *"I think that the senior managers in the municipality come with tailor-made decisions, where you take it or leave it and you have to struggle, I was just telling my friend, this morning you have to struggle to maintain you, because you can easily get lost in the process so maintaining your usual which I've done for the past fourteen years."*

These responses reveal a likely dissension between different levels of management within the municipality and how internal communication is managed:

> *"..and another thing, do you believe that the people on the ground get information equally as you would like you know you with the intranet and everybody with access to the computer are getting the information there on the ground; do you think they get the same level or quality and quantity of the information?"*

To make this argument clearer, another interviewee also mentioned the influence of the political context on communication satisfaction, which affects the relationships between management and employees:

> *"I think it always shouldn't be top-down, there needs to be, like an open door, not an open door because, you know I understand it's the culture and you know, we operate from within, there must be some space of flexibility if we need to engage through other mediums, then so be it".*

What can be noted in the analysis of the qualitative data related to the perceptions of overall communication satisfaction is that employees at the management level do not view communication as a combination of various elements but as a manifestation of one construct. While some interviews viewed communication satisfaction as the effectiveness of superior-subordinate relationships, others considered it to be the accessibility and access to certain communication channels, such as computers or telephone lines, for instance. This finding aligns with Pirotta et al. (2024:2) and Pandey and Garnett (2006:44), who observe the way in which communication performance is overlooked in the analysis of public sector performance, even though the association between good communication and optimum organisational output is evident. They claim that establishing "clear and effective channels of communication" fosters an environment for enhanced organisational performance. However, public employees' dependence on formal rules to execute their jobs alters the "normative workplace experiences of public employees," thereby creating a narrow view of communication satisfaction (DeHart-Davis et al. 2014:849). While each of the constructs is equally important in enhancing communication satisfaction, attention ought to be paid to the holistic experience of internal communication. As such, it can be argued that employees at the management level at eThekwini Municipality need more internal communication awareness and training, as that organisational members who are satisfied with the level of internal communication provided, tend to feel more inclined towards job satisfaction and produce a higher quality of work (Veloso et al. 2015:2; Welch 2015:28; Kim & Park 2014:64; Schneider et al. 2013:373; Harris & Nelson 2008:12; O'Donnell & Boyle 2008:4; Geldenhuys 2006:24; De Ridder 2004:22). The data also reveal that organisation's structure influences communication processes within an organisation, which affect employees' communication satisfaction.

Subsequently, poor communication satisfaction amongst employees leads to a dwindling sense of engagement in the organisation, waning job performance and reduced organisational output (Pirotta et al. 2024:12; Canary & McPhee 2011:2; MacLeod & Clarke 2009:135; Pandey & Garnett 2006:40; Verwey & du Plooy-Cilliers 2003:26). It can therefore be deduced that the characteristics of classical

organisation that continue in practice have a bearing on the organisational culture, climate, and ultimately communication satisfaction within administrative bureaucracies as they impress upon impersonal relationships, routinisation of activities, and focus on organisational goals above individual proclivities.

The quantitative results also display a tendency towards overall communication dissatisfaction in various clusters, as communication satisfaction considers various aspects of employee communication experiences within the organisation (Jaafari et al. 2022:10; White et al. 2010:8). The literature also reveals that local government organisations usually pay insufficient attention to the communication satisfaction needs of their employees, as councils consider maintaining political and public accountability as their primary function, and fail to appreciate the role of their internal stakeholders in fulfilling their mandate of service delivery and institutional integrity (Pirotta et al. 2024:3; Mafini & Pooe 2013:1; Fletcher 1999:45). South African local government organisations need to improve internal communication structures first, because employees must feel that they contribute to the overall success of the organisation (Herman 2018; Holeni 2018; Brand 2018; Boyd & Sutherland 2006:10).

Interpreting the qualitative and quantitative data in combination indicates that communication at eThekwini Municipality is established along the lines of these rigid bureaucratic structures, and traditionally inflexible organisational structures that could likely obstruct effective internal communication practices and hamper employees' communication satisfaction if these processes become routine and begin to reflect the organisational culture of the administration (Bente 2013:1714). Communication processes within bureaucratically structured organisations are, for the most part, authoritative, centralised, and favour pre-fixed norms and communication processes, which McPhee et al. (2025:132) refer to as a form of "self-structuring", a term closely linked to isomorphism in NIT literature.

5.2.3 Communication Climate: Its Impairment by Institutional Misalignment

While communication culture describes the communication structure of the organisation, climate describes how employees feel about their communication experiences within their work environment, which can vary between departments and units (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Schneider et al. 2013:380; Eisenberg & Riley 2001:307; Neher 1997:93). Organisational culture and communication climate have a reciprocal relationship, with structure being an important factor in

determining the communication climate in an organisation (Hunt and Ivergard 2007:30). Downs (1988:130) identifies communication climate as one of the strongest elements of communication satisfaction that is strongly correlated to job satisfaction.

With regard to the quantitative segment of the study, the climate construct consisted of five items. The overall satisfaction with the climate construct across the municipality revealed a mean score of 4.26, which is closely aligned with the middlemost scale of 4 in the CSQ, indicating a neutral response in the seven-point scale, but leaning towards slight dissatisfaction. The standard deviation from the mean indicates that most measurements fall within 1.33 points above and below the mean value, which indicates that most values fall in the slightly dissatisfied or the slightly satisfied categories.

Table 5. 11: Organisation-wide satisfaction with climate - statistical summary

Mean	4.2608789
Std Dev	1.3270742
Std Err Mean	0.0752515
Upper 95% Mean	4.4089471
Lower 95% Mean	4.1128106
N	311
Skewness	-0.421927
Kurtosis	-0.273229

Therefore, the data was further analysed to see where (in which clusters) the variance in the data occurred for the climate construct, using the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test. Table 5.12 reports on the statistical and practical significance for climate that revealed a p-value smaller than 0.05 (p=0.0020) and an F-ratio larger than 1 (F= 3.1326), indicating a statistically significant difference between means across clusters for the climate construct. This required further analysis to determine how large this difference between means for this dimension was using Cohen's f^2 measure. The effect size (f^2 measurement) revealed a medium effect size(f^2=0.29) that indicates that there is a notable issue concerning the fluctuating climate levels between clusters at *eThekwini Municipality*. In other words, the results from the ANOVA indicated that the means were not equal.

Table 5. 12: Statistical and practical significance for climate across clusters

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio	Prob > F	Cohen's f	Effect
				Statistical Significance	Statistical significance	Practical significance	
CLUSTER	8	41.83303	5.22913	3.1326	0.0020*	0.29	Medium
Error	302	504.11599	1.66926				
C. Total	310	545.94903					

Although the one-way ANOVA identified significant differences between the means for the climate construct, it does not reveal which means were different from which other means. Therefore, post-hoc t-tests were used to conduct pairwise comparisons to identify which means differed from each other. The post-hoc t-tests revealed statistically significant differences in satisfaction with communication climate in three clusters, namely corporate and human resources (M = 4.71), finance (M = 3.39), and governance and international relations (M = 3.89). Tables 5.13 -5.14 depict these differences in means for the climate construct.

Table 5. 13: Pairwise comparisons for climate across clusters

Level	Number	Mean	Std Dev	Std Err Mean	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Community and Emergency Service	55	4.05606	1.42240	0.19180	3.6715	4.4406
Corporate and HR	**46**	**4.70870**	**1.28562**	**0.18955**	**4.3269**	**5.0905**
Economic Dev and Planning	45	4.23556	1.29565	0.19314	3.8463	4.6248
Finance	**30**	**3.38500**	**1.39328**	**0.25438**	**2.8647**	**3.9053**
Governance and Int Relations	**16**	**3.88750**	**1.79476**	**0.44869**	**2.9311**	**4.8439**
Human Settlement Eng Serv Transport	23	4.38841	1.26326	0.26341	3.8421	4.9347
Man Operations Office	6	4.50000	0.74565	0.30441	3.7175	5.2825
Office City Manager	20	4.49000	1.21997	0.27279	3.9190	5.0610
Trading Services	70	4.47667	1.04841	0.12531	4.2267	4.7267

Table 5. 14: Connecting letters report for the difference between means: climate

Level			Mean
Corporate and HR	**A**		**4.7086957**
Man Operations Office	A	B	4.5000000
Office City Manager	A	B	4.4900000
Trading Services	**A**		**4.4766667**
Human Settlement Eng Serv Transport	A	B	4.3884058
Economic Dev and Planning	A	B	4.2355556
Community and Emergency Serv	A	B	4.0560606
Governance and Int Relations	A	B	3.8875000
Finance		**B**	**3.3850000**

*** [Levels not connected by the same letter are significantly different]**

While Table 5.13 reports on the differences between means among the clusters for climate, Table 5.14 presents the connecting letters report, which illustrates significant and non-significant comparisons with connecting letters. Scrutinising Tables 5.13 and 5.14, it can be seen that post-hoc t-tests revealed statistically significant differences in satisfaction with climate between three clusters. Corporate and HR, as well as Trading Services, showed significant differences from the Finance cluster, which can be seen in both Tables 5.13 and 5.14. Of particular interest is the Finance cluster (M = 3.38), leaning towards slight satisfaction. The two clusters (Corporate and HR and Trading Services) that significantly differ from the Finance cluster, lean towards slight dissatisfaction. Governance and International Relations (M = 3.88) lean more towards neutrality when rounded off (M>4), while the rest of the clusters lean more closely towards slight dissatisfaction (M >4). Of all the clusters, the results reveal that the Corporate and HR lean towards greater dissatisfaction in comparison to the other clusters. These differences are depicted in the diamond plot from SAS JMP Figure 5.5 below.

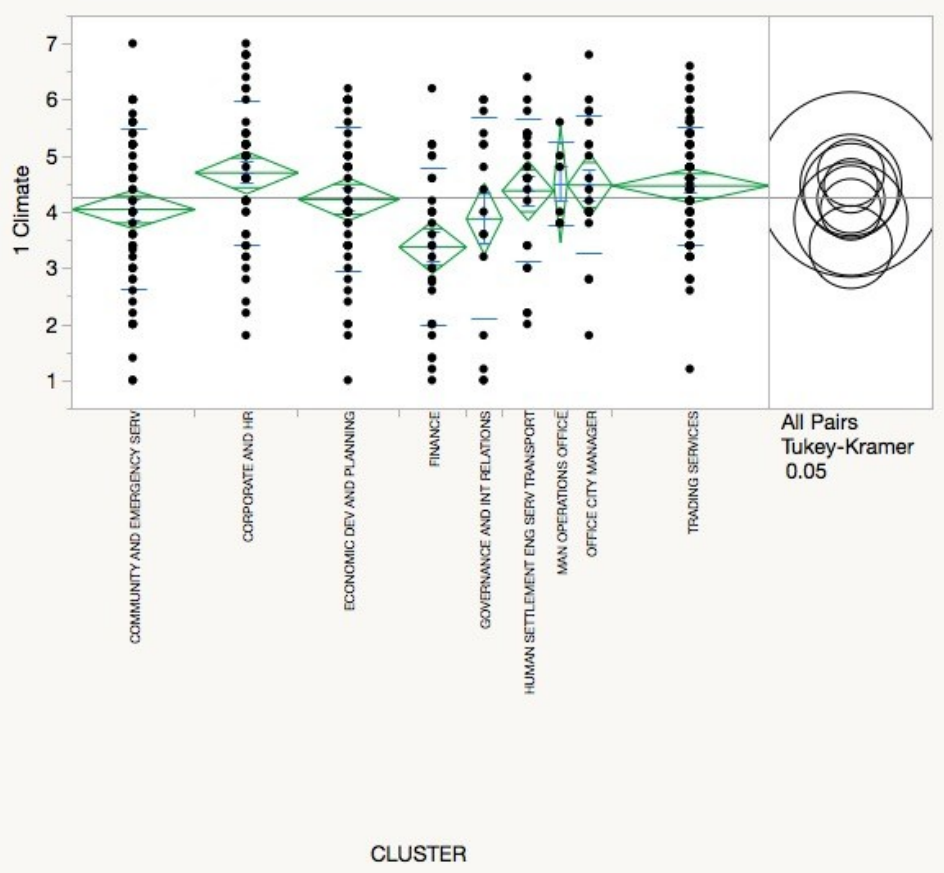


Figure 5. 5: Satisfaction with communication climate per cluster showing statistical significance between means

In this respect, further analysis according to management level revealed similar results, with no statistically significant differences between managers and non-managers. This data can be made available on request.

Variations in satisfaction with organisational climate have been observed in the interview data, as well, due to varying factors, as reported by respondents. Respondents cited leadership as one of the key determinants of climate. One respondent indicated that the organisational culture affected the communication climate due to differences in leadership styles across the municipality:

"Each unit is different, and different to the organisational culture of the entire municipality – depends on leadership. There are different types of leadership in the municipality. In the municipality as a whole, queries are noted, but not actioned on – no feedback is received on these queries. This affects the organisational culture – what management displays is what you get. Information travels mostly downwards".

"What is important for organisational culture is supervisor-subordinate relationships."

Participants also highlighted that the highly politicised and unionised environment within which the municipality functions affects the communication climate within different sections of the municipality:

"it's highly politicised."

"I won't say they happy. but they would always appreciate you, because you know, if you begin local government is still government, and they mainly unionised in Parliament; and of course there'll be issues, people with bring in other issues."

Other factors that influence satisfaction with organisational climate is the fact that the municipality is highly structured and formalised through legislation:

"So it's [Municipal System's Act] not unique to us at Ethekwini from a system which is being used by everybody, out there. But internal communication now within the municipality we need to have our own communication policy which is a guideline which guide the roles and responsibilities of communication within the organisation".

"I think we're quite bureaucratic in that, to be honest, I understand that we're governed by regulation and in order to achieve specific targets; and I'll say this that as community there has to be some kind of structure so operating with that environment can have its pros and cons, it's very top down and I'm sort of in the middle so I think as a manager at board somebody at the next level will probably have a different perspective but for me it's top down."

While the quantitative data reveal that there are low levels of satisfaction with the communication climate at eThekwini Municipality, the qualitative data reveal that variations between perceptions of climate are linked to different forms of leadership within and across clusters, the influence of the political environment within which the municipality functions, and the highly structured nature of communication. These findings align with the literature that points out that aspects of climate, such as trust, openness, and morale tend to have a negative statistical relationship with bureaucratic organisational cultures (Pandey & Garnett 2006:40). This could come from the fact that larger organisations, typical within the public sector, are usually more structured and formalised and tend to portray an impersonal, detached communication climate (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Hunt & Ivergard 2007:30; Pandey & Garnett 2006:40). The qualitative data reveals the highly bureaucratic and politicised nature of the organisation, which is a significant finding highlighting the influence of the institutional environment on communication climate.

5.2.4 Horizontal and Informal Communication: Analysis in the Context of a Destabilised Administration

Horizontal and informal communication focuses on lateral communication, or the communication between employees at the same level of the organisational hierarchy, and the extent to which information therein is accurate and free flowing (Downs 1988:113). Horizontal communication includes formal and informal communication (Eunson 2008:558). The formal aspect of horizontal communication probes the roles of tasks, work units, and divisions (Frederickson et al. 2012:109; Berkley & Rouse 2009:206). The objective of formal horizontal communication is to allow for interdepartmental cooperation and integration, to facilitate organisational efficacy and includes items about problem-solving, teamwork, and communication (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Sharma 2015:53; Eunson 2008:558; Sutherland & Canwell 1997:64). This factor also includes satisfaction with the activeness of the grapevine or informal communication between employees (Sharma 2015:53).

In terms of the quantitative aspect of the study, the horizontal and informal communication construct also consisted of five items. The overall satisfaction with this construct across the municipality revealed a mean score of 4.45, again indicating close alignment with the middlemost scale of 4 in the CSQ, but lying in close range to the slightly dissatisfied scale of 5. The standard deviation from the mean indicates that most measurements fall within 1.18 points above and below the mean value, which indicates that most values fall in the dissatisfied or slightly satisfied categories.

Table 5. 15: Organisation-wide satisfaction with horizontal and informal communication

Mean	4.4576389
Std Dev	1.1776779
Std Err Mean	0.0666729
Upper 95% Mean	4.5888259
Lower 95% Mean	4.3264519
N	312
Skewness	-0.55377
Kurtosis	0.2015526

Further testing was therefore done to identify if the means showed statistically significant differences across clusters. Just as the climate construct revealed a statistically significant difference between the mean values across clusters, so too did the horizontal and informal communication construct show a significant difference between means, indicating a p-value of 0.0002. This required further exploration to determine how large this difference between means for this dimension is, using

Cohen's f^2 measure. This analysis revealed a medium effect size that indicates there is a notable difference in satisfaction with horizontal and informal communication between clusters at *eThekwini Municipality*.

Table 5. 16: Statistical and practical significance for horizontal and informal communication across clusters

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio	Prob > F	Cohen's f	Effect
CLUSTER	8	40.50239	5.06280	3.9250	0.0002*	0.32	Medium
Error	303	390.83135	1.28987				
C. Total	311	431.33374					

Statistically significant differences in satisfaction with horizontal and informal communication in two clusters, namely finance (M= 3.63) and corporate and human resources (M = 4.96), were observed through post-hoc Tukey-Kramer's t-tests.

Table 5. 17: One-way ANOVA for horizontal and informal communication across clusters

Level	Number	Mean	Std Dev	Std Err Mean	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Community and Emergency Services	55	4.17818	1.40587	0.18957	3.7981	4.5582
Corporate and HR	**47**	**4.96241**	**0.89947**	**0.13120**	**4.6983**	**5.2265**
Economic Dev and Planning	45	4.47333	1.00762	0.15021	4.1706	4.7761
Finance	**30**	**3.62667**	**1.32819**	**0.24249**	**3.1307**	**4.1226**
Governance and Int Relations	16	4.35000	1.51701	0.37925	3.5416	5.1584
Human Settlement Eng Serv Transport	23	4.59130	1.10779	0.23099	4.1123	5.0703
Man Operations Office	6	4.70000	0.74565	0.30441	3.9175	5.4825
Office City Manager	20	4.44250	1.19904	0.26811	3.8813	5.0037
Trading Services	70	4.64857	0.92814	0.11093	4.4273	4.8699

Clearly, the finance cluster (M= 3.63) shows higher satisfaction with horizontal and informal communication, while the corporate and human resources cluster (M = 4.96) shows the lowest levels of satisfaction with horizontal and informal communication at *eThekwini Municipality*. These differences are depicted in Figure 5.7 below.

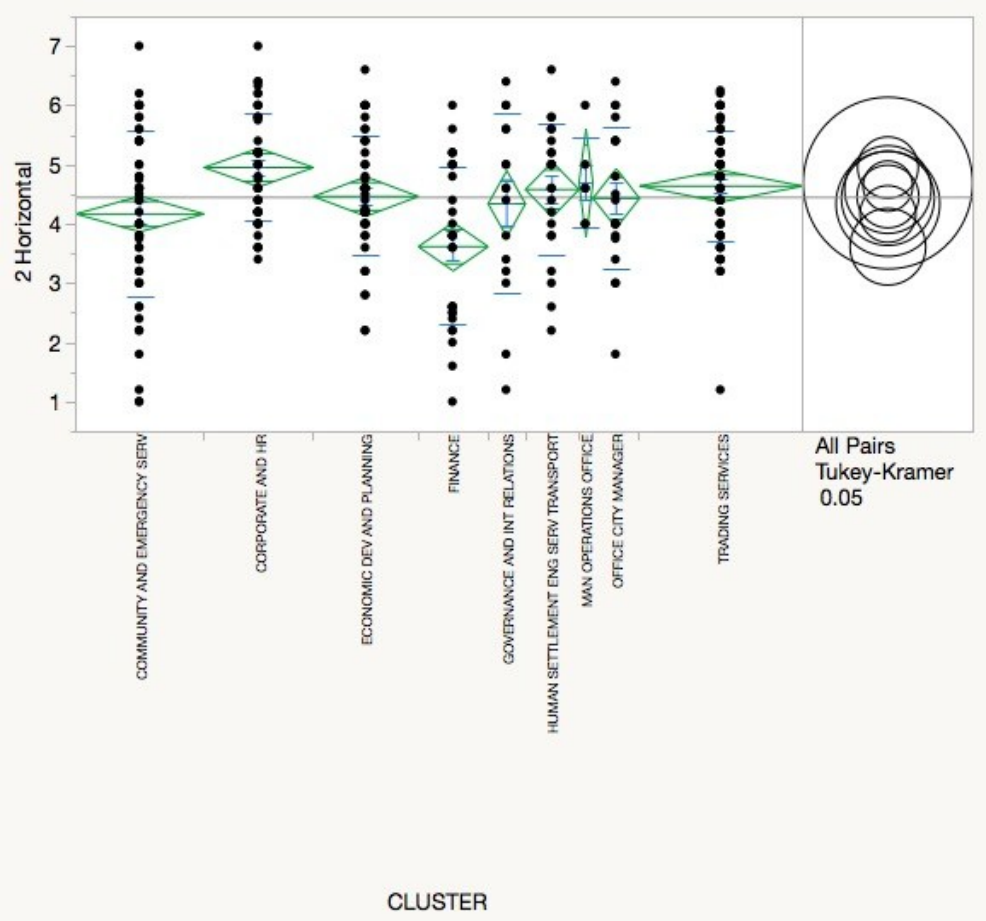


Figure 5. 6: One-way ANOVA: satisfaction with horizontal and informal communication per cluster, showing statistical significance between means

Again, further analysis, according to management level, revealed similar results, with no statistically significant differences between managers and non-managers for this dimension.

Interview data revealed a mixture of views concerning horizontal communication. There seem to be different levels of horizontal communication based on formal and informal structures, which is not consistent across the municipality and could explain the variations in satisfaction with horizontal and informal communication noted in the statistical data analysis. On the one hand, there seems to be little formal horizontal communication encouraged or practised within and between clusters, which could strengthen informal communication laterally:

> *"we've got different sectors and the particular unit that I'm working with we don't communicate effectively with the other new ones so we have, at the moment we've got, our performance management system has a tool to their, our own performance targets and so there is a lack of communication in that respect because everyone's got their own, how can I say that?"*

> *"The horizontal communication is very informal. And it's very strong. There's a strong network that is built up by officials."*

> *"Lack of team building – needs to be consistent municipality-wide (horizontally/vertically, etc.), not just in a unit."*

On the other hand, there seems to be a formal structure for horizontal communication between upper management:

> *"But I think our City Manager has tried to kind of get that out of the way. Because he's arranged to have, he has a Monday morning meeting. Through that Monday morning meeting, I think that kind of pulled everybody together."*

The quantitative data revealed a mixture of views concerning horizontal and informal communication, with only the finance cluster showing high levels of satisfaction with horizontal and informal communication. The corporate and human resources cluster shows high levels of dissatisfaction. The rest of the clusters lean towards slight dissatisfaction. The qualitative data also reveal similar findings. What can be noted is that informal communication is gaining traction at the eThekwini Municipality in areas where employees deem formal horizontal communication structures to be inadequate for their communication needs.

These findings align with the literature that indicates that employees become more actively engaged in informal communication networks when they deem formal means of communication as inadequate, thereby promoting grapevine communication (Fielding 2006:55). Although informal communication can travel via various media, the predominant channel of communication for communication is word-of-mouth, which enhances the speed of information travelling along this communication network (Sharma 2015:53; Fielding 2006:55).

The findings also reveal that the bureaucratic structure of the organisation influences how horizontal communication is practised across the organisation. The literature states that interdepartmental rivalry, unwillingness to share information across departments, lack of motivation and incentives for efficient lateral communication, and interdepartmental differentiation could create barriers to effective horizontal communication (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Sharma 2015:53; Eunson 2008:558; Sutherland & Canwell 1997:64). This would explain the variations in perceptions of this construct in the data.

Horizontal communication is overlooked and sometimes even discouraged in hierarchically organised organisations in an intended effort to improve productivity (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Jones 2010:163; Farmer 2008:53; Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers 2003:26). Thus, the qualitative data reveals the variations in formal horizontal communication between management and employees, where management has set out meetings between managers in the organisational structure, but this is not evident for the other employees at an interdepartmental level. This indicates silos of communication and poor interdepartmental collaboration.

This view perpetuates the notion of a rational myth that curtailing informal and interdepartmental communication leads to unfulfilled social needs, which would affect employee satisfaction as well as, by implication, performance. However, while horizontal communication might be discouraged in some bureaucratic organisations, it cannot be completely stopped, because the informal organisation can enhance organisational performance as employees use the informal channels of communication to disseminate not only company gossip but important organisational information that cements their identification with the organisation (Sharma 2015:53; Fielding 2006:55). Thus, it can be deduced that the bureaucratic structure of the eThekwini Municipality influences how horizontal communication is practised across the clusters.

5.2.5 Subordinate Communication: Interpreting Satisfaction within the Hierarchical Pressure

This dimension deals with how supervisors feel about the overall communication with their subordinates; therefore, only supervisors respond to items in this category (Downs 1988:113). This dimension considers communication overload, how responsive subordinates are to downward communication, and subordinates' inclination to initiate upward communication, as these elements would provide a platform for determining the communication satisfaction of superiors (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Sharma 2015:53).

With respect to the quantitative data, only managers had to answer the questions related to the subordinate communication construct, which consisted of five items, namely questions 42, 43, 44, 45, and 46. The overall satisfaction with this construct across the municipality revealed a mean score of 4.59, again closely aligned to the slightly dissatisfied scale of 5 but lying in close range with the middlemost scale of 4 (neutral) in the CSQ. The standard deviation from the mean indicates that most measurements fall within 1.20 points above and below the mean value, which indicates that

most values fall in the slightly dissatisfied or the slightly satisfied categories. Further testing was therefore done to identify if the means showed statistically significant differences across clusters for this construct, with a confidence level of 99 percent.

Table 5. 18: Organisation-wide satisfaction with subordinate communication

Mean	4.5911348
Std Dev	1.2042971
Std Err Mean	0.1014201
Upper 95% Mean	4.7916478
Lower 95% Mean	4.3906217
N	141
Skewness	-0.868384
Kurtosis	0.6509852

Further testing was therefore done to identify if the means showed statistically significant differences across clusters. This construct also revealed a statistically significant difference between the mean values across clusters, with a p-value of 0.0045. Further exploration using Cohen's f^2 measure revealed that the difference between means for this dimension is large, indicating that there is a discernible difference in managers' satisfaction with subordinate communication between clusters at *eThekwini Municipality*.

Table 5. 19: Statistical and practical significance for subordinate communication across clusters

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio	Prob > F	Cohen's f	Effect
CLUSTER	8	30.85170	3.85646	2.9563	0.0045*	0.42	Large
Error	132	172.19472	1.30451				
C. Total	140	203.04642					

Statistically significant differences in satisfaction with subordinate communication were observed in four clusters, namely, corporate and HR (M = 5.18), economic development and planning (M = 4.89), governance and international relations (M = 2.83), and trading services (M = 4.86), through post-hoc Tukey-Kramer's t-tests.

Table 5. 20: One-way ANOVA for subordinate communication across clusters

Level	No.	Mean	Std Dev	Std Err Mean	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Community and Emergency Service	29	4.00690	1.20651	0.22404	3.548	4.4658
Corporate and HR	**13**	**5.18077**	**0.73358**	**0.20346**	**4.737**	**5.6241**
Economic Dev and Planning	**20**	**4.89000**	**1.09058**	**0.24386**	**4.380**	**5.4004**
Finance	16	4.66875	1.19148	0.29787	4.034	5.3036
Governance and Int Relations	**3**	**2.83333**	**1.60728**	**0.92796**	**-1.159**	**6.8260**
Human Settlement Eng Serv Transport	10	4.17500	1.24035	0.39223	3.288	5.0623
Man Operations Office	2	4.20000	0.28284	0.20000	1.659	6.7412
Office City Manager	3	4.66667	0.98658	0.56960	2.216	7.1175
Trading Services	**45**	**4.85889**	**1.16820**	**0.17415**	**4.508**	**5.2099**

Clearly, the governance and international relations (M= 2.83) cluster shows the highest satisfaction with subordinate communication. However, due to the small sample size, and considering that only managers had answered this section of the questionnaire, caution needs to be practised in generalising the findings for this cluster. Still, the lowest levels of satisfaction with subordinate communication were noted amongst managers in the corporate and HR (M = 5.18), economic development and planning (M = 4.89), and trading services (M = 4.86) clusters. These differences are depicted in Figure 5.8 below.

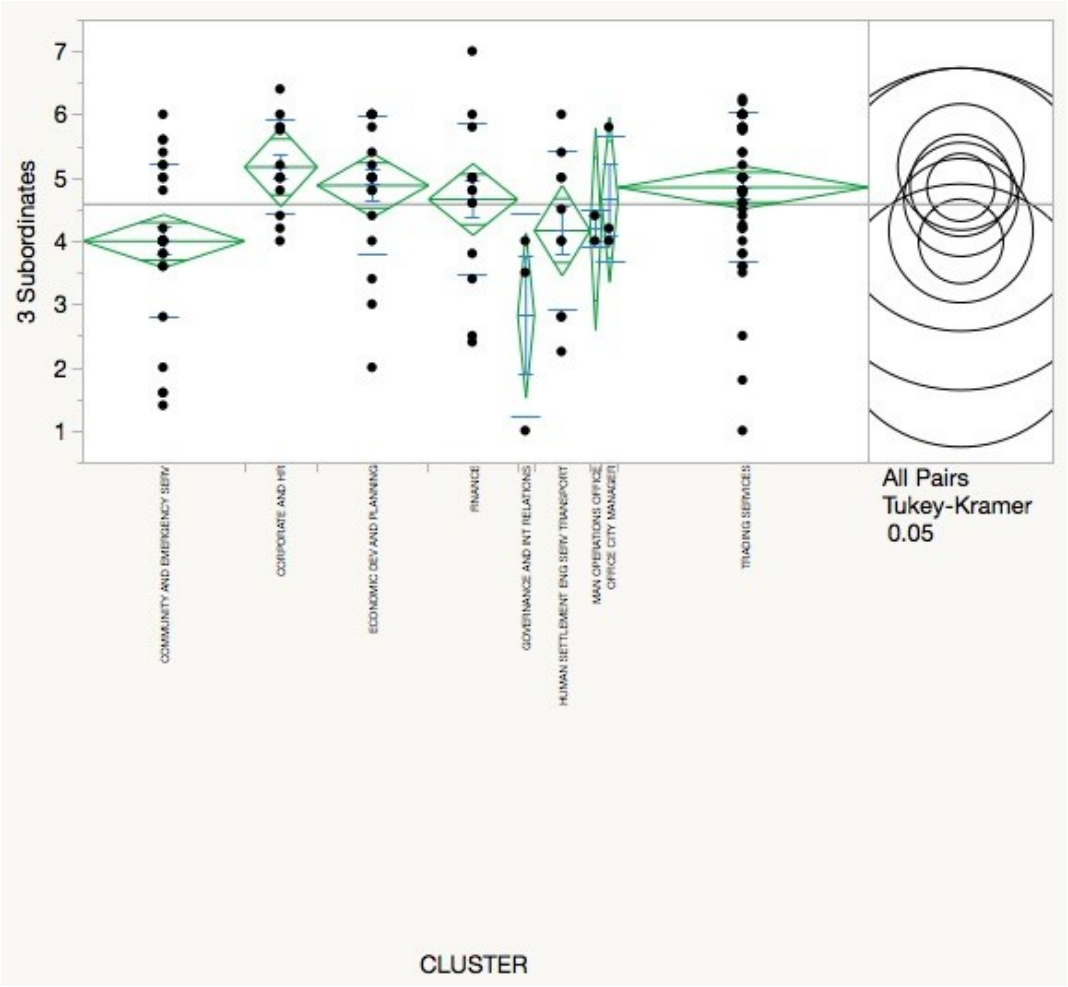


Figure 5. 7: One-way ANOVA: satisfaction with subordinate communication per cluster showing statistical significance between means

Further analysis according to management level could not be carried out, as managers only had to answer items for this construct, yielding an extremely small sample size for further analysis.

Qualitative interview data revealed that managers are responsible for initiating upward communication. Moreover, upward communication mostly takes place through staff meetings and structured forms of communication, such as performance reviews:

> *"It's an Initiative in line with the theme because we don't want to enter the space where we open personal issues because it is not our responsibility as a communications department but being managers, they've got through meetings."*

> "*Ja, on staff meetings. During the staff meeting give the feedback."*

"Look, there is structured feedback. Where you have a performance review list and you can talk about your projects and what you do and then what your challenges are etcetera."

The Siyalalela suggestion boxes are also not implemented across the municipality consistently:

"We don't even have complaints boxes which is supposed to be used."

Subordinates do not feel at ease engaging with superiors:

"In the sense that everything goes down, personnel, very little communication upwards, it's always challenges upwards, I mean, I have an issue myself where staff in my department have issues with me. They never engage me. The first time I heard that I had an issue was when my boss called a management meeting, and he raised the issue."

"…and we do have our staff meetings, for instance, in the organisation. And we do have informal meetings as well, but the challenge is more the fact that your senior management is in meetings all the time, strategic sessions, on an organisational level, so sometimes when you need to bounce things off."

Although the quantitative data reveal that one cluster (Governance and International Relations) reports high levels of satisfaction with subordinate communication, the rest of the clusters lean towards slight dissatisfaction with this dimension. This variation in the data could be linked to the small size of the governance and international relations cluster. This view is substantiated in the literature that asserts that the size of the organisation, structure, and the nature of the work carried out by employees are important considerations in subordinate communication (Sharma 2015:53; Eunson 2008:26; Hunt & Ivergard 2007:30; Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers 2003:167; Neher 1997:94).

The corporate and HR cluster showed the lowest levels of satisfaction with this dimension. The qualitative data also reveals a largely top-down approach to communication in the municipality, with formal feedback mechanisms for employees. This view aligns with literature reporting that bureaucracies rely predominantly on downward information channels to transmit work-related information, such as policies, directives, and so on, to employees (Frederickson et al. 2012:109; Neher 1997:160). Employees expect information from the top tiers of the organisation to be reliable, sufficient, functional, and timely to meet their specific job requirements successfully (Fielding 2012:52). Information overload and insufficient or inaccurate information are common problems with downward communication that need to be considered in the organisation's strategic plan for internal communication (White et al. 2010: 20).

The data reveals that eThekwini Municipality has limited channels for upward communication and, mostly, very structured downward communication that employees find is inadequate for their communication needs. The literature substantiates this view, asserting that the efficacy of upward communication is established when employees feel that management has recognised their opinions without a sense of being prejudiced or subject to physical or psychological intimidation, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging to the organisation (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Engin & Akgoz 2013:111). The findings align with the literature related to bureaucratic structure. Structure influences the organisational culture within administrative bureaucracies (Little 2021; Christensen et al. 2007:45). Organisational structures, such as rules, policies, job descriptions, and organisational charts, create a framework for formal and impersonal organisational processes in bureaucracies (Monteiro & Adler 2021:434; O'Riordan 2015:11; Chen & Rainey 2014:947; Franks 1989:327; Meyer & Scott 1983; Meyer & Rowan 1977).

Thus, it can be concluded that eThekwini Municipality emphasises formalisation. This finding aligns with the literature that denotes that machine bureaucracies exhibit a largely inflexible administrative core and a rigid chain of command that struggles to deal with non-routine or unanticipated circumstances (Monteiro & Adler 2021:427; Egeberg 2012:117; Lunenburg & Ornstein 2012:42; Jones 2010:131; Mazzei 2010:222; Sutherland & Canwell 1997:48; Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers 2003:180). Local government organisations in South Africa fall into the category of machine bureaucracies. Emphasis is placed on authority and top-down control, which fosters a culture of obedience and rule-following, while the rigid division of labour encourages a focus on specialised tasks. Communication tends to be formal and structured, limiting the spontaneous exchange of ideas. The impersonal nature of bureaucratic structures promotes neutrality and fairness, but can also dampen morale and reduce personal connections within the organisation.

5.2.6 Organisational (Corporate) Perspective: Employee Views on Corporate Direction under Political Coercion

The organisational perspective dimension focuses on the dissemination of information about the organisation in general, encompassing organisational policies, goals, financial position, and performance level and includes knowledge of government policies affecting organisational functioning (Sharma 2015:53; Downs 1988:113). Employees should be well informed about the organisation's goals and objectives and understand them well enough to be able to align their jobs

with the overall mission of the organisation (Jaafari et al. 2023:13; Sharma 2015:46; Hunt & Ivergard 2007:31; Sempane, Rieger & Roodt 2002:28).

In terms of the quantitative data, the organisational (corporate) perspective construct also consisted of five items. The overall satisfaction with this construct across the municipality revealed a mean score of 4.25, again very closely aligned to the middlemost scale of 4 in the CSQ, indicating neutrality. The standard deviation from the mean indicates that most measurements fall within 1.23 points above and below the mean value, which indicates that most measures fall in the slightly dissatisfied or slightly satisfied categories.

Table 5. 21: Organisation-wide satisfaction with organisational (corporate) perspective

Mean	4.2517039
Std Dev	1.2332686
Std Err Mean	0.0697085
Upper 95% Mean	4.3888621
Lower 95% Mean	4.1145458
N	313
Skewness	-0.582436
Kurtosis	-0.074334

Further testing was therefore done in order to identify if the means showed statistically significant differences across clusters for this construct. A statistically significant difference between the mean values across clusters, with a p-value of 0.0097, was revealed for the organisational (corporate) perspective construct. Further exploration, using Cohen's f^2 effect size measure, revealed a medium difference between means for this dimension, indicating that there is a notable difference in employees' satisfaction with this dimension between clusters.

Table 5. 22: Statistical and practical significance for organisational (corporate) perspective across clusters

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio	Prob > F	Cohen's f	Effect
CLUSTER	8	30.16524	3.77065	2.5796	0.0097*	0.26	Medium
Error	304	444.37163	1.46175				
C. Total	312	474.53687					

Post-hoc Tukey-Kramer's t-tests revealed statistically significant differences in satisfaction with information received about the organisation as a whole in two clusters, namely, community and

emergency services (M = 3.91), and finance (M = 3.56). While these clusters leaned more towards neutrality in their responses, the inclination of the sentiment is towards the slightly satisfied category. Nonetheless, the rest of the clusters leaned towards slight dissatisfaction with this construct (M > 4), indicating that information about the organisation, as a whole, is not satisfactory according to employees in the municipality.

Table 5. 23: One-way ANOVA for organisational (corporate) perspective across clusters

Level	No.	Mean	Std Dev	Std Err Mean	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Community and Emergency Services	**56**	**3.91071**	**1.44016**	**0.19245**	3.5250	4.2964
Corporate and HR	47	4.41489	1.27467	0.18593	4.0406	4.7891
Economic Dev and Planning	45	4.43630	1.00480	0.14979	4.1344	4.7382
Finance	**30**	**3.55833**	**1.42309**	**0.25982**	**3.0269**	**4.0897**
Governance and Int Relations	16	4.40000	0.99331	0.24833	3.8707	4.9293
Human Settlement Eng Serv Transport	23	4.40870	0.94094	0.19620	4.0018	4.8156
Man Operations Office	6	4.86667	0.92664	0.37830	3.8942	5.8391
Office City Manager	20	4.60750	1.02447	0.22908	4.1280	5.0870
Trading Services	70	4.35357	1.16651	0.13942	4.0754	4.6317

It is clear that the corporate and community and emergency services (M = 3.91), and finance (M = 3.56) clusters show the highest satisfaction with the organisational (corporate) perspective. These differences are depicted in Figure 5.8 below.

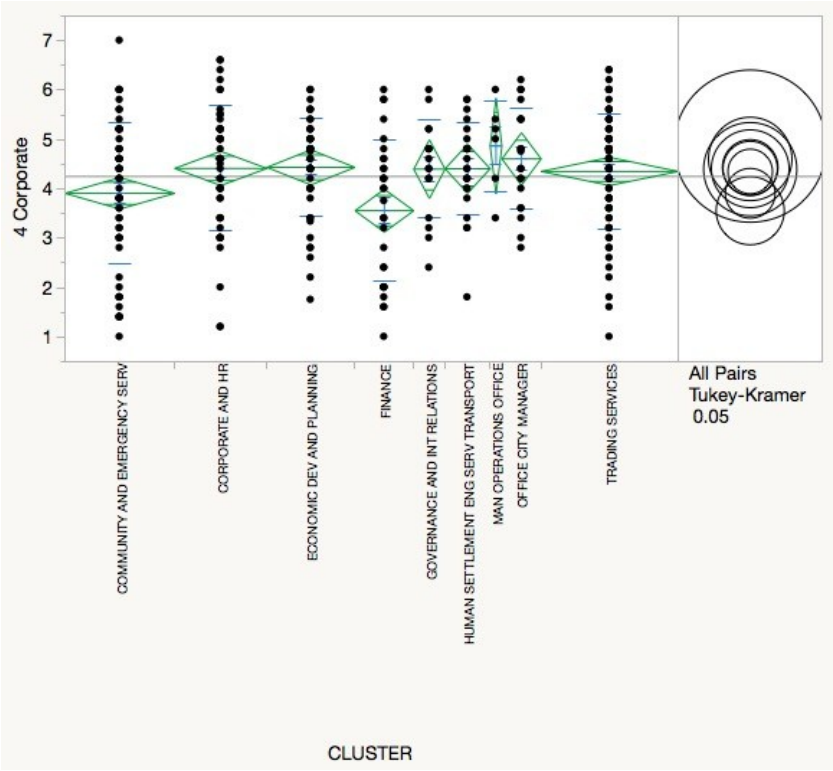


Figure 5. 8: One-way ANOVA: satisfaction with organisational (corporate) perspective per cluster showing statistical significance between means

Again, further analysis according to management level revealed similar results, with no statistically significant differences between managers and non-managers for this construct.

The qualitative interview data reveal that employees need to have knowledge of important organisational information by means of which to deliver crucial services to the public. This could explain why the community and emergency services cluster reports higher satisfaction with the organisational (corporate) perspective construct. Critical services in the municipality require that immediate information be sent out to employees:

> *"Because we're dealing with lives in this particular aspect, especially with our clients being police and fire and so forth, but in most instances, decisions are arrived at in terms of policies, in terms of agreements and so forth. It's consultative, it's participative, and it certainly is democratic."*

> *"From an emergency perspective, it's based on mass alerts, if something happens in the City it's required by us to send out mass alerts of pertinent information to the stakeholders or the people that do. On a real-time basis."*

Information is mostly disseminated via electronic communication systems, such as email and the Intranet. However, there is some dissatisfaction noted in the amount of information received, which creates a barrier to receiving important information:

"The advantages for us, we've got computers to get that."

"Right, now the challenge with that is that in a day or in a week you get so much of information that's disseminated via info-info, however, amongst very good information it gets disseminated via info-info. There's also useless information gets disseminated. So good information gets lost in the mix of information that shouldn't be communicated."

"Whilst email and like is important but if I'm am receiving 200 emails in your inbox to siphon the important from less important becomes an issue or challenge."

Access to important organisational information for employees without computer access is created through various other means, inter alia noticeboards and staff meetings:

"When they go back to their centres, where they report to, they get to that information. At some stage, they will even mail letters, attach them to their pay slips. I don't know if you saw when you came in, where you'd see there are newspapers like this, like you see, this pile of newspapers."

"But the municipality is actually making that effort to try and make sure that everybody gets that information."

Despite the slight variations in the quantitative data, which revealed that two clusters leaned towards slight satisfaction with an inclination towards neutrality, the bulk of the data reveals that employees are not satisfied with the information about the organisation in general that they receive. The qualitative data substantiates this view, adding that redundant information and information overload add to their dissatisfaction with this dimension of communication satisfaction. The literature states that employees need information on key organisational objectives, as well as the organisation's performance to align their performance with organisational goals (Sharma 2015:53; Downs 1988:113).

Employees should be well-informed about the organisation's goals and objectives and understand them well enough to be able to align their jobs with the overall mission of the organisation (Jaafari et al. 2023:13; Sharma 2015:46; Hunt & Ivergard 2007:31; Sempane, Rieger & Roodt 2002:28). The data also reveals that a lot of information dissemination is routine and does not distinguish between valuable and redundant information that adds to information overload and communication

dissatisfaction. These findings align with the literature related to rational myths that states that not only are activities and processes routinised, but formal message construction and dissemination are also subjected to rigid repetitions and conventional guidelines to the extent of becoming rational myths (Fredriksson 2014:325; Barley 2011:200; Hardy 2011:192; Lammers 2011:157).

Consequently, the data reveals that eThekwini displays excessive formalisation in their communication structures. This level of excessive formalisation impedes effective communication and information dissemination as the focus is on efficiency and not on the effectiveness of the information shared. The data aligns with the literature in this respect, indicating, that while formalisation helps organisations enhance efficiency and effectiveness, local government organisations usually focus more on efficiency, while neglecting effectiveness (Monteiro & Adler 2021:427). Optimally functioning organisations need to be both efficient and effective to thrive.

Efficiency involves doing things well through the input of various resources to achieve clearly defined organisational outputs. In other words, efficiency involves the technical aspects of an organisation's performance in relation to the resources utilised (Monteiro & Adler 2021:433; Bansal 2020; Walker & Andrews 2015:103). On the other hand, effectiveness involves doing the right things well and entails strategically implementing resources for optimised performance (Bansal 2020; Walker & Andrews 2015:103; Berkley & Rouse 2009:283). This argument indicates that eThekwini Municipality needs to carefully assess the communication and information needs of its employees to ensure that it disseminates the required information through the most adequate means in order to balance efficient and effective communication about the organisation to its internal stakeholders.

5.2.7 Organisational Integration: The Fragmentation of Systems due to Administrative Shock

While the organisational perspective dimension concerns organisational information, the organisational integration dimension revolves around the amount of information individuals receive about their direct working environment (Downs 1988:113). Employees' knowledge and skills about both their jobs and the organisation provide them with the opportunity to become organisational advocates with the clients, who in turn can enhance the organisation's reputation (Jaafari et al. 2023:13; D'Aprix 2011:258; Mishra et al. 2014:184).

With respect to the quantitative aspect of this study, the organisational integration construct consisted of five items. The overall satisfaction with this construct across the municipality revealed a mean score of 4.61, again very close aligned to the middlemost scale of 4 in the CSQ indicating neutrality; but leaning more towards slightly dissatisfied (M>4). The standard deviation from the mean indicates that most measurements fall within 1.28 points above and below the mean value, which indicates that most measures fall in the dissatisfied or the slightly satisfied categories.

Table 5. 24: Organisation-wide satisfaction with organisational integration

Mean	4.6145966
Std Dev	1.2843492
Std Err Mean	0.07248
Upper 95% Mean	4.7572063
Lower 95% Mean	4.4719869
N	314
Skewness	-0.76001
Kurtosis	0.1127607

Further testing was therefore done to identify if the means showed statistically significant differences across clusters for this construct. A statistically significant difference between the mean values across clusters, with a p-value of 0.0069, was revealed for the organisational integration construct. Further exploration, using Cohen's f^2 measure revealed a medium difference between the means for this dimension, indicating that there is a notable difference in employees' satisfaction with this dimension between clusters.

Table 5. 25: Statistical and practical significance for organisational integration across clusters

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio	Prob > F	Cohen's f	Effect
CLUSTER	8	34.20456	4.27557	2.7049	0.0069*	0.27	medium
Error	305	482.10548	1.58067				
C. Total	313	516.31004					

Statistically significant differences in satisfaction with information received about the immediate working environment (i.e., at departmental and cluster level) were observed in two clusters, namely, governance and international relations (M = 4.21), and finance (M = 3.85), through post-hoc Tukey-Kramer's t tests.

Table 5. 26: One-way ANOVA for organisational integration across clusters

Level	No.	Mean	Std Dev	Std Err Mean	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Community and Emergency Service	56	4.42321	1.44798	0.19349	4.0354	4.8110
Corporate and HR	47	4.87340	1.22074	0.17806	4.5150	5.2318
Economic Dev and Planning	45	4.54667	1.16338	0.17343	4.1971	4.8962
Finance	**30**	**3.84667**	**1.58935**	0.29017	3.2532	4.4401
Governance and Int Relations	**16**	**4.20625**	**1.34980**	0.33745	3.4870	4.9255
Human Settlement Eng Serv Transport	23	4.79565	1.07976	0.22515	4.3287	5.2626
Man Operations Office	6	4.93333	0.85479	0.34897	4.0363	5.8304
Office City Manager	21	4.81667	1.11841	0.24406	4.3076	5.3258
Trading Services	70	4.91262	1.10195	0.13171	4.6499	5.1754

While there is an indication of slight satisfaction with this dimension in the finance (M = 3.85) cluster, the mean score leans more towards neutrality with organisational integration. Nonetheless, the rest of the clusters leaned towards slight dissatisfaction with this construct (M > 4); indicating that information about the immediate working environment is not satisfactory according to employees in the municipality. These differences are depicted in Figure 5.28 below.

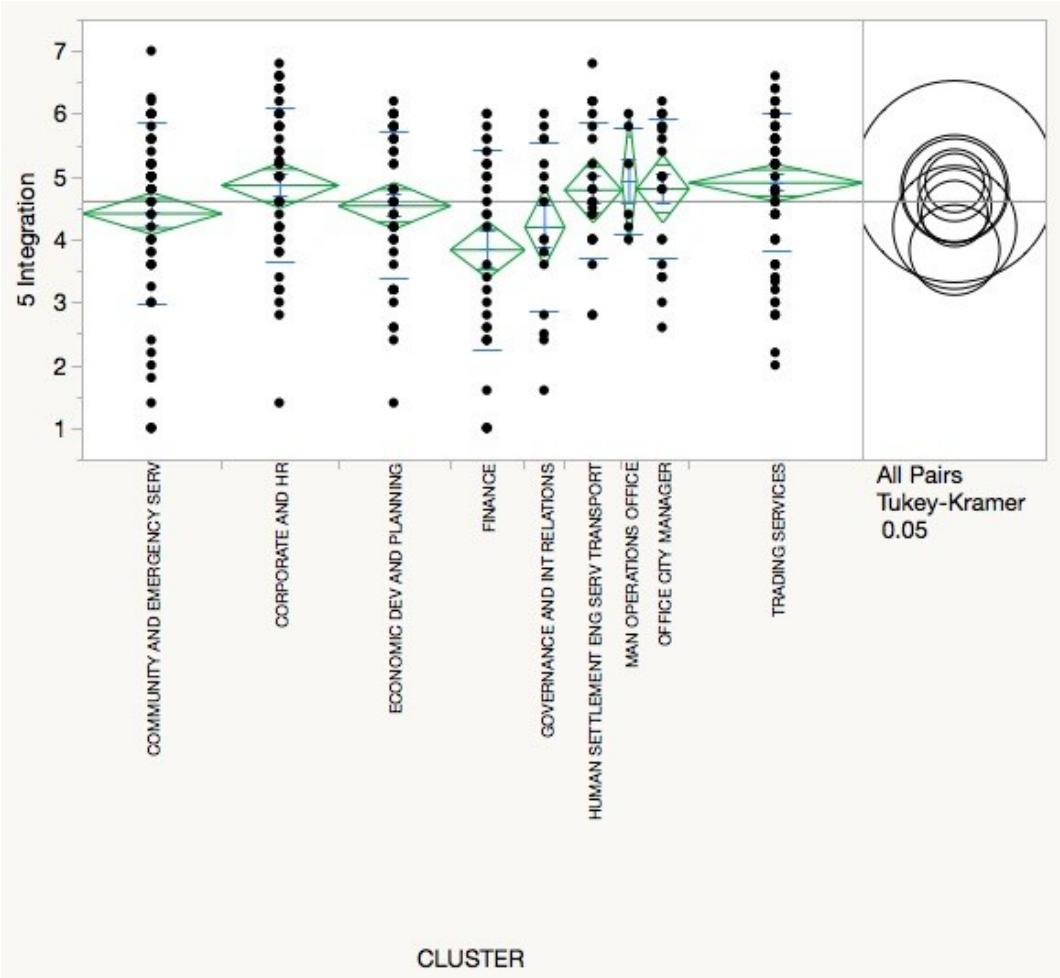


Table 5. 27:One-way ANOVA: satisfaction with organisational integration per cluster showing statistical significance between means

Again, further analysis according to management level revealed similar results, with no statistically significant differences between managers and non-managers for this construct.

The qualitative interview data revealed that information is cascaded to departments and units in a top-down manner, indicating a very structured communication approach:

> *"Be it the departmental level, be it [unclear] be it at whatever level some big department where it's hard to have a meeting every month, they will cascade it down through their supervisors, who discuss it with their members. So that one level of communication, which is structured and hence we always say on the top of communication, people always make a mistake, thinking that communication is done by our department because it's the communication department."*

Receiving important information about the immediate work environment is a challenge for employees without computers and Internet access, as most information is disseminated via email and the Intranet:

> *"In terms of cascading the information inside the municipality. But for someone who's working out there in Umlazi, reporting in one of the depots, who doesn't have a computer to receive all these, doesn't have an office to start with, it would be a different scenario altogether."*
>
> *"That's why the issue of management comes in because they communicating via a medium where communication alone is not enough. That's why you rely more on your supervisors, on your managers whose communicating all this information because these people don't have offices, they don't even go to report, they will meet on the site* [unclear] *and throw meetings."*

Although quantitative data reveals that the finance cluster shows slight satisfaction towards organisational integration, the mean score leans more towards neutrality. Nonetheless, the overall quantitative results reveal that information about the immediate working environment is not satisfactory according to employees in the municipality. The qualitative findings align with this view and add more insight into this phenomenon. Participants indicated that receiving adequate information about their immediate working environments and jobs is a challenge in various respects. They indicate issues with high levels of formalisation and strict hierarchical flows of information that do not consider the diverse needs of employees. For example, participants indicated that managers convey important work-related information via channels of communication that do not reach the groundworkers, who do not have offices or access to email systems.

These employees depend on information on the site (such as refuse removal), but the information does not reach this level. Thus, the data reveals that there are communication barriers in the communication systems, as the hierarchical nature of the communication system and the lack of communication adequacy impede the dissemination of important information at the eThekwini Municipality. The literature corroborates these findings, indicating that organisational communicators need to distinguish between "*what employees must know* (task-related information), *what they ought to know* (essential but desirable organisational information, e.g., changes in senior management), and *what they could know* (relatively unimportant office gossip), all of which makes the task of effective communication within organisations even more challenging" (Kitchen & Daly 2002:50).

These arguments and the data align with the view of the existence of a parallel duality in public organisations, where organisations struggle to balance internal and external legitimacy. The structural components of an organisation determine the vertical and horizontal differentiation, such as task specialisation and centres of authority (referring to external legitimacy) within an organisation, while the work processes within each department are dependent on the coordination of internal communication strategies (referring to internal legitimacy) (Byrkjeflot & du Gay 2012:96; Aiken et al. 1980:636). In other words, organisations strive to gain external legitimacy by imitating formal organisational structures common within their operational field in the meso environment, while at the same time, managing the communication function strategically within the organisation to gain internal legitimacy (Byrkjeflot & Du Gay 2012:96; Aiken et al. 1980:636). The findings reveal that eThekwini Municipality displays this characteristic of differentiation between structure and activities in highly institutionalised local government organisations.

As a result, many processes and procedures within local government organisations merely become rituals or “rational myths” that do not necessarily enhance service delivery (Ongaro 2020:138; Weber 2001:123; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:147; Weber 1947:14). Thus, once local government organisations become institutionalised, they strive to establish rationally structured entities and usually follow a hierarchical blueprint of structure, command, and control that, ideally, should enhance efficiency because of established practices, but this is not always the case. In other words, organisations adopt rational structures and practices to gain legitimacy in the institutional environment without discriminating between performance-enhancing and performance-hindering institutionally aligned practices. Hence, such a pursuit of rationality is mythical. The data aligns with these arguments presented in the literature, as eThekwini Municipality approaches information dissemination as a rational myth, without strategically implementing effective work-related communication to its diverse employees. Hence, the data reveals dissatisfaction with this dimension of communication satisfaction.

5.2.8 Media Quality: Efficacy of Communication Channels during the P-A Disruption

The media quality dimension considers the usefulness, quality, and quantity of information received from communication sources, such as publications, memoranda, and meetings, through numerous channels (Jaafari et al. 2023:14; Sharma 2015:53; Downs 1988:113). Selecting the optimal internal communication approach rests on the expectations and beliefs of employees, as well as on the potential efficiency of message delivery, ensuring a mix of affective and effective messages.

In terms of the quantitative data, the media quality construct consisted of five items, namely, questions. The overall satisfaction with this construct across the municipality revealed a mean score of 4.58, again very closely aligned to the middlemost scale of 4 in the CSQ, indicating neutrality, but leaning more towards slightly dissatisfied (M>4). The standard deviation from the mean indicates that most measurements fall within 1.25 points above and below the mean value, which indicates that most measures fall in the dissatisfied or slightly satisfied categories.

Table 5. 28: Organisation-wide satisfaction with media quality

Mean	4.5781517
Std Dev	1.2548722
Std Err Mean	0.0710431
Upper 95% Mean	4.7179377
Lower 95% Mean	4.4383657
N	312
Skewness	-0.629517
Kurtosis	-0.020816

Further testing was therefore done to identify if the means showed statistically significant differences across clusters for this construct. A high statistically significant difference between the mean values across clusters, with a p-value of 0.0001, was revealed for the media quality construct. Further exploration, using Cohen's f^2 measure, revealed a medium difference between the means for this dimension, indicating that there is a noteworthy difference in employees' satisfaction with this dimension between clusters.

Table 5. 29: Statistical and practical significance for media quality across clusters

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio	Prob > F	Cohen's f	Effect
CLUSTER	8	57.21694	7.15212	5.0104	<.0001*	0.36	medium
Error	303	432.51607	1.42745				
C. Total	311	489.73301					

Post-hoc Tukey-Kramer's t-tests revealed statistically significant differences in satisfaction with media quality in three clusters, namely, city managers' operations office (M = 5.23), corporate and human resources (M = 5.12), and finance (M = 3.72).

Table 5. 30: One-way ANOVA for media quality across clusters

Level	No.	Mean	Std Dev	Std Err Mean	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Community and Emergency Services	55	4.11455	1.45760	0.19654	3.7205	4.5086
Corporate and HR	**47**	**5.12128**	**1.11700**	**0.16293**	**4.7933**	**5.4492**
Economic Dev and Planning	45	4.72296	1.01672	0.15156	4.4175	5.0284
Finance	**30**	**3.72000**	**1.36518**	**0.24925**	**3.2102**	**4.2298**
Governance and Int Relations	16	4.27500	1.67153	0.41788	3.3843	5.1657
Human Settlement Eng Serv Transport	23	4.78478	1.01348	0.21133	4.3465	5.2230
Man Operations Office	**6**	**5.23333**	**0.54283**	**0.22161**	**4.6637**	**5.8030**
Office City Manager	20	4.93000	0.89507	0.20014	4.5111	5.3489
Trading Services	70	4.69714	1.07447	0.12842	4.4409	4.9533

The city manager's operations office (M = 5.23) and the corporate and human resources (M = 5.12) show the highest levels of dissatisfaction with media quality. However, due to the small sample size for the city manager's operations office (N=6), caution needs to be practised in generalising the findings for this cluster. While the finance cluster (M = 3.72) leans towards neutrality with media quality, the mean score reveals a slight satisfaction with this construct. This is an important finding that needs to be explored some more in subsequent studies in order to understand why the perceptions of communication differ in this cluster.

Nonetheless, the rest of the clusters leaned towards slight dissatisfaction with this construct (M > 4); indicating that the media quality is not satisfactory according to employees in the municipality. These differences are depicted in Figure 5.9 below.

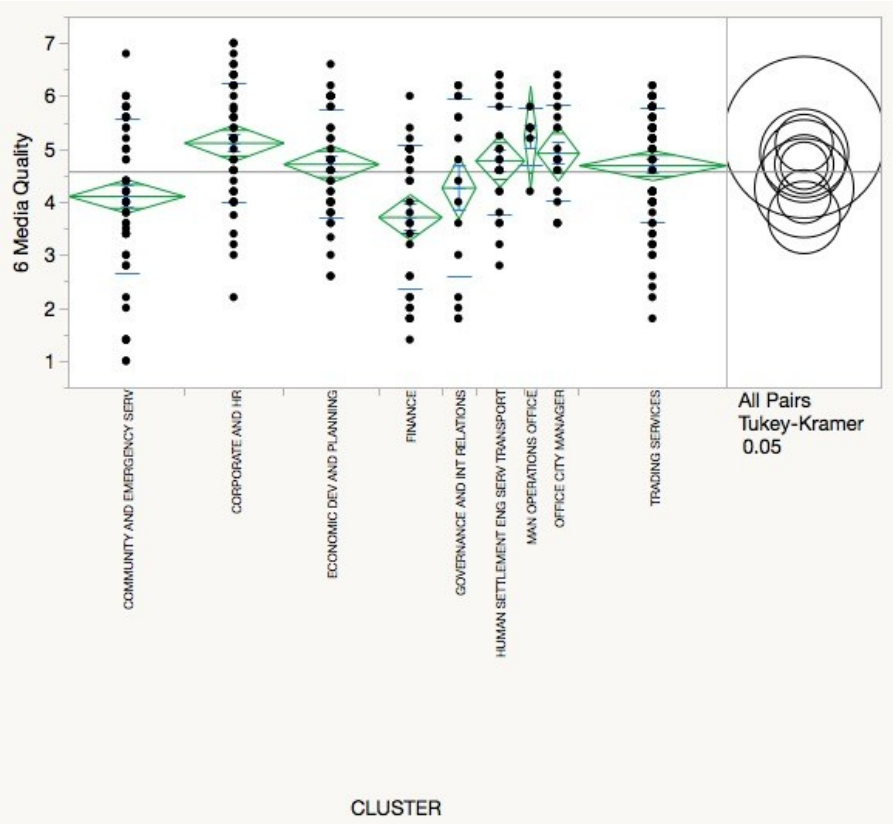


Figure 5. 9: One-way ANOVA: satisfaction with media quality per cluster showing statistical significance between means

Again, further analysis according to management level revealed similar results, with no statistically significant differences between managers and non-managers for this construct.

The qualitative interview data revealed participants' views about media quality, i.e., channels used, meetings, and the amount of communication received. Some respondents revealed satisfaction with overall media quality:

> *"But as far as I'm concerned, I would think comparing with my previous employers, I would think we're doing pretty well in as far as communicating the issues within; and I would think because the departmental meetings will always depend on those respective departmental managers."*

Some employees are content with email as a primary channel of communication, although this is not a widespread sentiment:

> *"But I'm quite satisfied with the medium that's used. It's an electronic medium and of course, it's flashed out at info-info. Maybe it will be something that does not reflect the entire opinion of the department that I'm in."*

Although various channels and mediums of communication are utilised in the municipality, they are not done so effectively, according to some of the interview participants. Some of their views are presented below:

> *"At the moment it's not satisfactory, we're not using technology to the extent that we should be but then to a certain extent, you cannot blame the municipality because it's such a big municipality and there is so much information going around, even if it was available, maybe one wouldn't be able to access it all because to time constraints."*

> *"Like we have, we have TVs at places where customers go and pay their rates and water and lights account, that can be used more effectively by showing maybe news to the municipality about what is currently happening."*

Overall, the quantitative data reveal that employees are not satisfied with the media quality at eThekwini Municipality, with the city manager's operations office (M = 5.23) and the corporate and human resources (M = 5.12) showing the highest levels of dissatisfaction with media quality. Although caution needs to be practised in generalising the findings for the city manager's operations office due to the small sample size, it is a significant finding that needs to be explored at greater length in future studies. The city manager's operations office is the primary point of interaction with the institutional environment, particularly the political structures of local government, which have a bearing on the internal communication satisfaction of its employees, according to the literature.

In the South African context, regulatory bodies, such as national and provincial governments as well as municipal councils, formulate laws and policies to which municipalities are compelled to abide in the administrative aspect of their mandate (Scott & Meyer 1994:38). The literature states that the regulative pillar is an important determinant of organisational structuring and behaviour, particularly in local government organisations. It forms the basis for normative and cultural-cognitive pillars that embody the guiding principle for formal and impersonal communication within public organisations (Tjilen et al. 2021: 443; Chaney & Slimane 2014:97; Scott 2008:53; Hoffman 2001:179). While this study gained insight into the influence of the institutional environment through qualitative interviews,

it did not specifically focus on particular clusters per se. Thus, future studies aligned with these specific perspectives should be carried out to gain insight into this phenomenon.

Nonetheless, the qualitative data reveal mixed perceptions about media quality. Some participants were content with this construct, while others were dissatisfied. However, participants acknowledged the efforts of the municipality in trying to enhance the media quality dimension by using various communication channels and disseminating various types of information. The problem identified is communication adequacy and effectiveness as identified in the data analysis and interpretation of the organisational perspective and organisational integration dimensions. The data corroborates the arguments posited in the literature stating that communicators in organisations need to develop a strategic mix of various media formats and channels for effective internal communication that would establish information and communication adequacy (Sharma 2015:43; White et al. 2010:7).

Selecting the optimal internal communication approach rests on the expectations and beliefs of employees as well as on the potential efficiency of message delivery, as well as a balance between affective and impersonal media and messages to engage employees optimally (Jaafari et al. 2023:14; Sharma 2015:53; White et al. 2010:7; Downs 1988:113). Thus, the data aligns with the arguments in the literature that there is an ongoing debate in public administration discourse concerning effective and efficient administration, which is a dilemma in local government organisations. In other words, due to various reasons, and as discussed in this thesis, public organisations struggle to find the right balance between effective and efficient communication and administration to provide optimum services to their constituents (Bansal 2020; Walker & Andrews 2015:103; Berkley & Rouse 2009:283). These findings reveal some aspects of innovation at eThekwini Municipality. According to the literature, traditional public administration values (formalisation) merge with corporate culture values (innovation, creativity, continuous improvement) to foster customer-focused service (Monteiro & Adler 2021:441; Budd 2007:539). This links to the arguments on activity coordination in the literature.

Activity coordination comes into play when non-routine activities need to be attended to that require human agency, or ‘adjustment’ (McPhee et al. 2025:116; Miller 2015:92; Putnam et al. 2009:11; McPhee & Zaug 2000:9). According to McPhee and Zaug (2000:9), “the process of adjusting the work processes and solving immediate practical problems requires the sort of communication called activity coordination.” This supposition aligns with the notion of a parallel duality in public organisations and complements the argument that administrative bureaucracies can present

elements of mechanical organising, but they are not necessarily entirely mechanistic systems (Monteiro & Adler 2021:441; Byrkjeflot & du Gay 2012:94; Suddaby 2011:157; Boxembaum & Jonsson 2008:79; Terry 2003:59; Aiken et al. 1980:636). Hence, the findings reveal that eThekwini Municipality displays some innovation in the media quality dimension but struggles to balance this with communication adequacy.

5.2.9 Communication with Superiors: Management Roles and Communication Flow during the Disruption

While the subordinate communication dimension assessed superiors' satisfaction with their subordinates, superior communication assessed subordinates' satisfaction with the communication with their managers (Downs 1988:113). Being able to communicate effectively with subordinates is an important indicator of good leadership skills among supervisors (Jones 2010:162). Therefore, the superior-communication dimension assesses the extent to which superiors are open to ideas that subordinates put forward and their willingness to listen and pay attention to employees under their supervision (Downs 1988:113). The extent to which supervisors offer guidance to their employees in solving job-related problems is also considered in this dimension (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Sharma 2015:53; Downs 1988:113).

The superior communication construct consisted of five items, namely, questions. The overall satisfaction with this construct across the municipality revealed a mean score of 5.025, leaning towards the slightly dissatisfied (M>4) scale. The standard deviation from the mean indicates that most measurements fall within 1.41 points above and below the mean value, which indicates that most measures fall in the dissatisfied or neutral categories.

Table 5. 31: Organisation-wide satisfaction with communication with superiors

Mean	5.0254808
Std Dev	1.4062618
Std Err Mean	0.0796139
Upper 95% Mean	5.1821308
Lower 95% Mean	4.8688308
N	312
Skewness	-0.803838
Kurtosis	0.075408

Further testing was therefore done to identify if the means showed statistically significant differences across clusters for this construct. A high degree of statistically significant difference between the mean values across clusters, with a p-value of 0.0001, was revealed for the superior communication construct. Further exploration, using Cohen's f^2 measure, revealed a medium difference between the means for this dimension, indicating that there is a noteworthy difference in employees' satisfaction with superior communication between clusters.

Table 5. 32: Statistical and practical significance for communication with superiors across clusters

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio	Prob > F	Cohen's f	Effect
CLUSTER	8	64.59544	8.07443	4.4448	<.0001*	0.34	medium
Error	303	550.42949	1.81660				
C. Total	311	615.02493					

Statistically significant differences in satisfaction with communication with superiors were revealed, through post-hoc Tukey-Kramer's t-tests, in most clusters. The highest dissatisfaction was observed in the office of the city manager (M = 5.60) and the corporate and human resources cluster (M = 5.55). The finance cluster (M = 4.28) and the governance and international relations cluster (M = 4.23) both leaned towards neutrality.

Table 5. 33: One-way ANOVA for communication with superiors across clusters

Level	No.	Mean	Std Dev	Std Err Mean	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Community and Emergency Services	55	4.72091	1.54577	0.20843	4.3030	5.1388
Corporate and HR	**47**	**5.55319**	**1.17452**	0.17132	5.2083	5.8980
Economic Dev and Planning	45	4.72333	1.47304	0.21959	4.2808	5.1659
Finance	**30**	**4.28000**	**1.44852**	**0.26446**	**3.7391**	**4.8209**
Governance and Int Relations	**16**	**4.22500**	**1.88308**	**0.47077**	**3.2216**	**5.2284**
Human Settlement Eng Serv Transport	23	5.28043	1.03163	0.21511	4.8343	5.7265
Man Operations Office	6	5.43333	1.06145	0.43333	4.3194	6.5473
Office City Manager	**20**	**5.60250**	**1.21357**	**0.27136**	**5.0345**	**6.1705**
Trading Services	70	5.32357	1.15095	0.13757	5.0491	5.5980

Clearly, the office of the city manager (M = 5.60) and the corporate and human resources (M = 5.55) show the highest levels of dissatisfaction with communication with superiors. Nonetheless, the rest of the clusters leaned towards slight dissatisfaction with this construct (M > 4), indicating that the communication with supervisors is not satisfactory according to employees in the municipality. These differences are depicted in Figure 5.10 below.

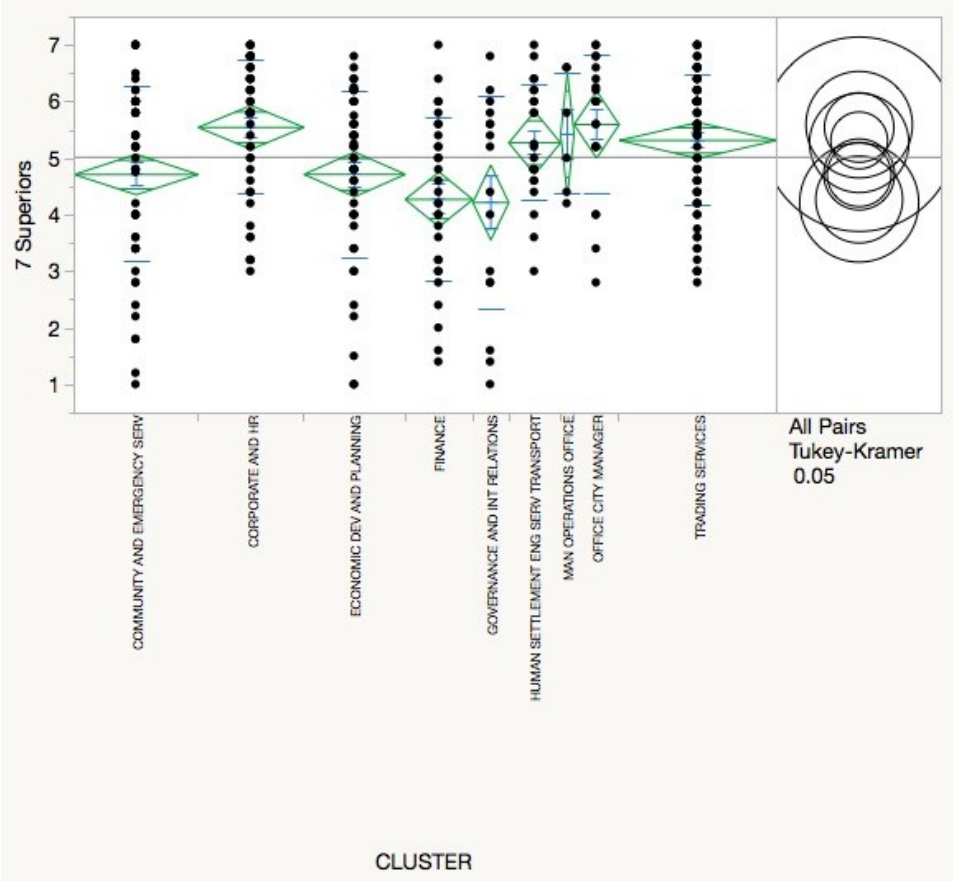


Figure 5. 10:One-way ANOVA: satisfaction with superior communication per cluster showing statistical significance between means

Again, further analysis according to management level revealed similar results, with no statistically significant differences between managers and non-managers for this construct.

The qualitative data cannot reveal a holistic view of superior communication as interviews were conducted with superiors only. Lower-level employees did not have the opportunity to engage here. However, it should be noted that many of the interviewees were in middle and lower management positions, so they portrayed information about their own interactions with their superiors. This indicates the complex nature of bureaucratic organisations with intricate levels of task specialisations

and job descriptions. The literature accentuates this viewpoint noting that hierarchy, structure, and the specialisation of tasks are elements of the ideal type, that persist in the public sector due to the emphasis on technical efficiency and rational precision, simplifying the complex task of executing government policy (Boddy-Evans 2020; Shafritz & Hyde 2017:69; DeHart-Davis, Davis, & Mohr 2014:850; Lynn 2012:19; Peters & Pierre 2012:2; Whitford 2012:396; Farazmand 2009:2; Jaffee 2008:89; Sutherland & Canwell 1997:193; Gortner 1986:100). The organisation of functions into specialised units reduces variability in the coordination of tasks and reduces the arbitrary power that managers could exercise over their employees (Monteiro & Adler 2021:432; Kim 2014:8; Carruthers 2012:4; Whitford 2012:399; Yesilkagit 2010:153; Jaffee 2008:89; Sutherland & Canwell 1997:48). Consequently, although the interviewees had their own superior communication interactions, these views cannot be transferred to lower-level employees who were not part of the qualitative sample.

Nonetheless, the qualitative interview data revealed that communication with superiors follows a top-down, formal approach:

> *"You go through the structure system where you'll have City Manager issuing out the circular to senior managers, senior managers in turn will cut paper information down to their supervisors, supervisors will cascade it further down to everybody down there at the grass root level till everybody gets the message. So that will be a structural communication, it is informed by the bureaucratic structure to see the City Manager there, because depending on the matter, there are matters which he can broadcast to everybody in the municipality, but there are issues that will need engagement where you need to engage your staff members because it's not only a one-way street when you talk of communication."*

> *"It's not dependent on one person, City Manager or the Mayor but every manager has got a responsibility on their performance contract. To communicate matters, cascade information to your staff members so it is not the responsibility of our office at the corporate communication department but it is a management responsibility."*

Again, the issue of leadership style was brought up, more specifically in relation to superior-subordinate relationships:

> *"Because there are some managers who are like firm, and there are those managers who can operate in an office."*

Upward communication is encouraged through the Siyalalela programme, which installed suggestion boxes across the Municipality:

> *"Of listening to people it does have a purpose, I think some may say it's a waste of time but I'll think that feeling as a unit head you get to understand the feeling and the thinking of the people on the ground but above that our HR have got this programme what they call Siyalalela (we are listening)".*

Smaller departments have more open communication policies. This is a significant finding that would explain the variations in perceptions of communication for some dimensions:

> *It's mostly through the staff meeting. Emails and they knock on your door. We're not a very big department, so it's easy for us."*

According to the quantitative data, the office of the city manager and the corporate and human resources departments show the highest levels of dissatisfaction with communication with superiors. This is a significant finding that needs to be explored further in future studies. Nonetheless, overall, the quantitative data reveal that employees are not satisfied with superior communication. The qualitative data provides insight into the influence of the size of departments, communication adequacy and satisfaction. This view was noted and corroborated with literature in the discussion of a previous dimension. The literature states that the size of the organisation, structure, and the nature of the work carried out by employees has a bearing on the relationship between subordinates and their direct managers (Sharma 2015:53; Eunson 2008:26; Hunt & Ivergard 2007:30; Verwey & du Plooy-Cilliers 2003:167; Neher 1997:94).

Trust, openness, and morale tend to have a negative statistical relationship with bureaucratic organisational cultures. This could come from the fact that larger organisations, typical within the public sector, are usually more structured and formalised and tend to portray impersonal, detached relationships (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Hunt & Ivergard 2007:30; Pandey & Garnett 2006:40). This argument indicates that as departments become larger, the communication becomes more impersonal. The data thus reveals this characteristic and sheds light on the variability in communication satisfaction between departments in relation to size. This is an important finding that needs to be explored more in future studies.

The qualitative data also revealed that eThekwini relies on a top-down approach to communication. Leadership style was also noted as an important aspect of determining satisfaction with superior communication. The literature states that the inclination to initiate upward indication diminishes when subordinates feel that managers ignore their suggestions, or are unwilling to listen to constructive criticism, reducing trust in the superior-subordinate relationship thereby creating a platform for

information distortion (Jaafari et al. 2023:13; Fielding 2006:53). This argument links with the data in terms of leadership styles and its effect on the satisfaction with superior communication. Impersonal leadership styles, characteristic of bureaucratic organisations, hinder effective communication on this dimension. Berkley and Rouse (2009:216) argue that upward communication is riddled with problems within hierarchically organised administrations, as "the first role requirement of executives and supervisors is to direct, coordinate, and control the activities of persons below them." Therefore, information travelling along the hierarchical line of command is viewed as a control mechanism thereby discouraging employees from initiating upward communication out of fear of reprisal (Berkley & Rouse 2009:216). When considering the link between institutional messages and the study of bureaucratic organisations, with a particular focus on government organisations, Lammers (2011:160) highlights the notion of 'bureaucratese'.

Bureaucratese is the formal, impersonal, and authoritative nature of some institutional messages within bureaucracies that create a power distance between superiors and subordinates, which denotes a preference for impersonal superior-subordinate relationships. The analysis of superior-subordinate relationships is an important element of the communication satisfaction construct. Hence, the participants in different levels of management reveal that eThekwini Municipality largely displays rigid, impersonal superior communication, typical of administrative bureaucracies. Smaller departments, however, display more open leadership styles among superiors, which has a positive influence on superior communication. The quantitative data, however, indicate strong dissatisfaction with this dimension, which corroborates with the literature related to impersonal relationships in hierarchical organisations, as discussed above.

5.2.10 Personal Feedback: P-A Disruption and Interpersonal Communication

Personal feedback is a factor that contains questions about superiors' understanding of problems faced on the job and whether or not employees feel the criteria by which they are judged are clear (Jaafari et al. 2023:13; Eunson 2008:326). Feedback is also a two-way process, working from management to employees and vice versa. This communication response system creates agreeable work relationships that will direct employee development initiatives (Sharma 2015:53; Gbadamosi 2003:8). The satisfaction with personal feedback construct consisted of five items. The overall satisfaction with this construct across the municipality revealed a mean score of 4.06, leaning towards the neutral scale (M=4). The standard deviation from the mean indicates that most

measurements fall within 1.43 points above and below the mean value, which indicates that most measures fall in the slightly dissatisfied or neutral categories.

Table 5. 34: Organisation-wide satisfaction with personal feedback

Mean	4.0610224
Std Dev	1.4329395
Std Err Mean	0.0809945
Upper 95% Mean	4.2203869
Lower 95% Mean	3.9016578
N	313
Skewness	-0.333773
Kurtosis	-0.784425

Further testing was conducted to identify if the mean scores across clusters exhibited statistically significant differences for this construct. A p-value of 0.0509 was revealed for personal feedback, indicating a result that approached statistical significance and suggested a marginal difference between means. To further interrogate this finding, Cohen's f^2 was calculated. This measure revealed a medium effect size, indicating a practically significant and notable difference in employees' satisfaction with personal feedback across the various clusters, despite the p value=0.05 slightly exceeding the conventional 0.05 threshold.

Table 5. 35: Statistical and practical significance for personal feedback across clusters

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio	Prob > F	Cohen's f	Effect
CLUSTER	8	31.45365	3.93171	1.9620	0.0509	0.23	medium
Error	304	609.18083	2.00388				
C. Total	312	640.63447					

Post-hoc Tukey-Kramer's t tests revealed statistically significant differences in satisfaction with personal feedback in two clusters, namely, finance (M = 3.32) and the city manager's operations office (M = 4.5).

Table 5. 36: One-way ANOVA for personal feedback across clusters

Level	No.	Mean	Std Dev	Std Err Mean	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Community and Emergency Services	56	3.99732	1.44110	0.19257	3.6114	4.3833
Corporate and HR	47	4.14574	1.46513	0.21371	3.7156	4.5759
Economic Dev and Planning	45	4.00000	1.39809	0.20842	3.5800	4.4200
Finance	**30**	**3.32000**	**1.56743**	**0.28617**	**2.7347**	**3.9053**
Governance and Int Relations	16	3.52500	1.83576	0.45894	2.5468	4.5032
Human Settlement Eng Serv Transport	23	4.32391	0.99246	0.20694	3.8947	4.7531
Man Operations Office	**6**	**4.50000**	**1.04881**	**0.42817**	**3.3993**	**5.6007**
Office City Manager	20	4.23250	1.47222	0.32920	3.5435	4.9215
Trading Services	70	4.36143	1.31910	0.15766	4.0469	4.6760

The finance cluster (M = 3.32) leans towards being slightly satisfied, and the city manager's operations office (M = 4.5) leans more towards being slightly dissatisfied. Nonetheless, the value for the city manager's operations office has to be read with caution, especially when generalising results within this cluster, due to the relatively small sample size (N =6). The rest of the clusters lean towards neutrality (M =4), indicating that the personal feedback is something that employees, across the municipality, do not want to comment on, or something they have not thought about. These differences are depicted in Figure 5.11 below.

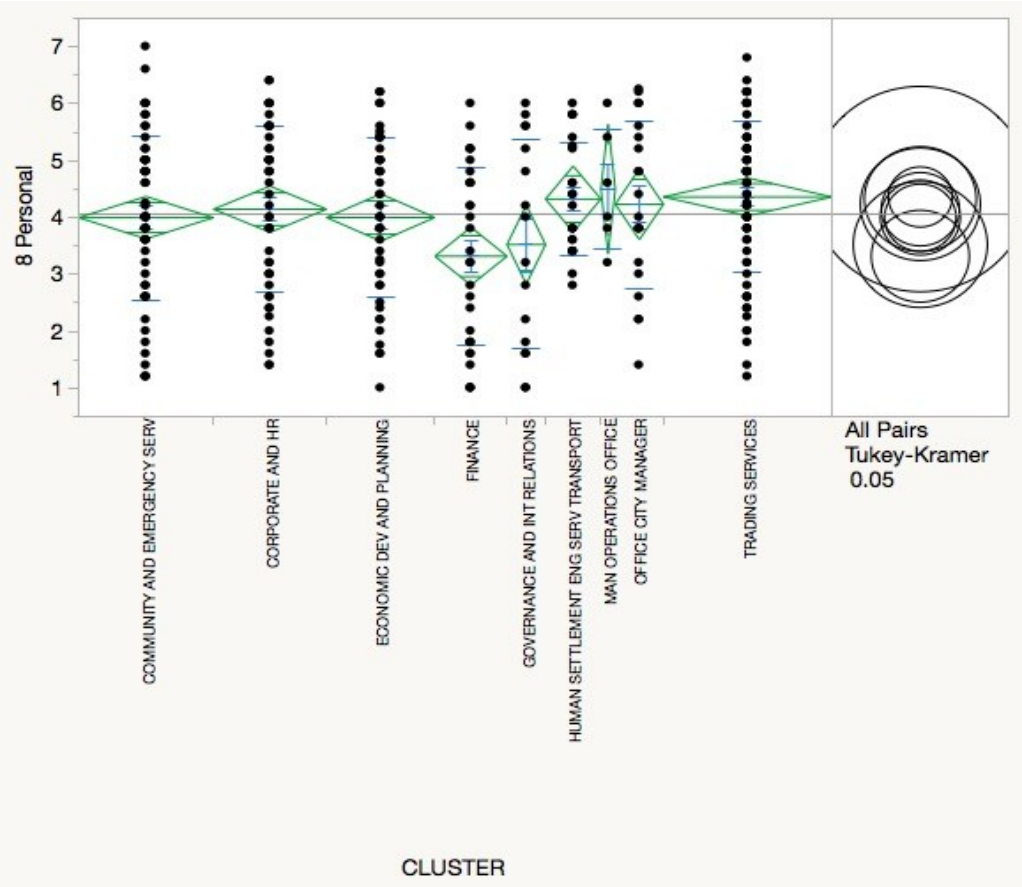


Figure 5. 11: One-way ANOVA: satisfaction with personal feedback per cluster showing statistical significance between means

Again, further analysis according to management level revealed similar results, with no statistically significant differences between managers and non-managers for this construct.

The qualitative data reveals that managers are ultimately responsible for initiating personal feedback systems, particularly in a bureaucratic structure:

> *"It would be a two-way street where staff members will voice their thinking around the matter so that one will go via the senior manager, the senior managers will discuss it, especially where there's a need for clarity around the, especially on policy issues, it's not something you can communicate via circular to everybody, you need managers to discuss it with their staff members at meetings."*

Asynchronous means of feedback are implemented from the communication department, such as news features and editorials in municipal publications. Employees do not use these avenues often:

> *"Well as a communications department in the publications we always provide that stuff from within our publications where we invite people to tell us about any issues the municipality but in these instances it doesn't get used."*

Personal feedback can be challenging in large departments that have many ground workers:

> *"We have thousands of staff members working in different departments, working in different sides, some of them they won't report it within the office, they'll go straight to their site of work so their sequence of meeting, maybe they will meet maybe twice a year because of the site. And you find that the senior management will meet them once a year. I know the Parks Department will have a road show every year where they will meet in their clothes and it becomes a big mass meeting then they will raise the issues at that foots level. Further than that, our HR guys."*

The quantitative data reveals that personal feedback is something that employees, across the municipality, do not want to comment on, or something they have not thought about, as the bulk of the results lean towards neutrality. It is interesting to note that the finance cluster leans towards being slightly satisfied as with some other dimensions discussed earlier. This phenomenon needs to be explored more to understand this variation in communication satisfaction across dimensions in this cluster. Nonetheless, the city manager's operations office leans more towards being slightly dissatisfied. Again, since this cluster is small in size, the findings should be read with caution, especially when generalising results within this cluster. The revelation is interesting, nonetheless. The qualitative data indicate that feedback systems are mostly initiated by superiors. Most channels of feedback are formal and controlled. This is a classic feature of bureaucratic organisations.

The largely impersonal nature of feedback indicates isomorphic tendencies at eThekwini Municipality. The literature corroborates this view stating that pursuing rational organisation places pressures on local government organisations to conform to legitimated norms, which in turn leads to the replication of organisational processes at the meso level (Gottschalk & Hamerton 2024:43; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:147). These tendencies can be seen in the adoption of the traditional Western model of bureaucratic organisational forms and political governance systems adopted by many African countries and continues to be implemented (Gegana & Phahlane 2024; Abugre 2014:655; Kettl & Fesler 2009:16). This involves the drafting of organisational strategies, policies, and standard operating procedures, as well as the selection of channels of communication that resemble the constitutions of their peers in their field due to isomorphic pressures to conform.

Organisations adopt institutionally accepted ideals of organisational functioning due to a perception that these structures enhance rational and efficient functioning across the field in a general sense (Monteiro & Adler 2022:435; Thoenig 2012:189; Boxembaum & Jonsson 2008:80). The problem arises when organisations conform to institutional norms to the extent where organisational processes and functioning merely become ceremonial to mimic the institutional ideal of efficiency, without actually improving organisational functioning. The data reveals that this impersonal feedback system is not adequate as employees indicate dissatisfaction with this dimension. The anomalous results of the finance cluster can be attributed to the parallel duality evident in some aspects of the organisations, which needs to be explored more in further studies. The literature asserts this view, that although the structure and policies of the public organisation are fixed (self-structuring flow), the management styles and communication patterns (activity co-ordination flow) adopted within hierarchically organised institutions are dependent on the strategic implementation of these processes by superiors in key positions in the hierarchy (Monteiro & Adler 2021:441; Byrkjeflot & du Gay 2012:94; Suddaby 2011:157; Boxembaum & Jonsson 2008:79; Terry 2003:59; Aiken et al. 1980:636).

5.3 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS AND RESULTS

This chapter analysed and reported the results of the empirical study. Firstly, the demographic data was presented, and then the descriptive and inferential statistics were explained, beginning with the overall communication satisfaction in the municipality. The results of all the questions in the questionnaire were reported by focusing on eight constructs of communication satisfaction across the clusters in the municipality, which were substantiated with the interview data. The findings indicated that the overall communication satisfaction of employees within the municipality as a whole is slightly dissatisfactory, with slight variations in mean scores across clusters and constructs. Nonetheless, further stratification of data, into management and non-management categories, revealed no statistically significant variations. This could be because the additional stratification resulted in very small sample sizes for the strata. This stratification can be useful for further studies. However, larger samples per management level should be used to obtain more feasible data for this level of stratification.

Apart from the perceptions of the overall communication satisfaction of employees at eThekwini, the findings and results for each of the eight communication satisfaction constructs were provided against the backdrop of the institutional backdrop of public organisations, which will be referred to

as findings from now on. While there were some variations in the results, the overall sentiment for each of the constructs was dissatisfaction. The data revealed that the institutional environment affects organisational culture and communication satisfaction in the bureaucratically structured eThekwini Municipality. The institutional environment following the 2016 local government elections created a distinct institutional rhetoric that fundamentally challenged the integrity of the existing Political-Administrative (P-A) Dichotomy at eThekwini Municipality during the period of March 2017–September 2017. This shift was driven by the political sphere's introduction of coercive influence, making bureaucratic ideals intensely noticeable. Thus, the administration faced the challenge of either rigidly adhering to formal rules and hierarchy as a defence against interference or observing the erosion of these established procedures in response to political demands.

The findings corroborate the literature, asserting that, although the structure and policies of the public organisation are fixed (self-structuring flow), the management styles and communication patterns (activity co-ordination flow) adopted within hierarchically organised institutions are dependent on the strategic implementation of these processes by superiors in key positions in the hierarchy (Monteiro & Adler 2021:441; Byrkjeflot & du Gay 2012:94; Suddaby 2011:157; Boxembaum & Jonsson 2008:79; Terry 2003:59; Aiken et al. 1980:636). This is a significant finding that indicates that although the structure and policies of the public organisation are fixed (self-structuring flow), the management styles and communication patterns (activity co-ordination flow) adopted within hierarchically organised institutions are dependent on the strategic implementation of these processes by superiors in key positions in the hierarchy (Monteiro & Adler 2021:441; Byrkjeflot & du Gay 2012:94; Suddaby 2011:157; Boxembaum & Jonsson 2008:79; Terry 2003:59; Aiken et al. 1980:636). In other words, despite the rigidity of bureaucratic organisation and structure, effective communication is possible through strategic planning and implementation. This point is important in addressing the overall research problem, which is discussed in the final chapter of this thesis. The final chapter reviews the research aims by addressing the research problem and the sub-problems, and presents the overall conclusions for this thesis.

CHAPTER 6: REVIEW OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 5 presented the analysis and discussion of the results and findings of the empirical part of this study, addressing both qualitative and quantitative data collection segments, and providing the interpretation of the findings and results within the theoretical framework. Reference to "findings" in the combined interpretation and conclusions encapsulates both qualitative and quantitative data throughout the thesis. Finally, this chapter addresses the overarching research problem and the sub-problems and research questions that stem from it methodically and systematically, to ensure that all aspects of the research aims have been adequately addressed. The discussion is structured around the three research objectives that guided the investigation, which were then broken down into sub-problems and research questions and discussed as such in this chapter. Objective 1 sought to establish the macro-institutional context of South African local government and its bearing on internal communication, with specific reference to the post-2016 municipal elections disruption at eThekwini Municipality. Objective 2 examined the meso-organisational culture, considering both the theoretical characteristics of culture in public organisations and its empirical influence on communication management during the disruption period. Objective 3 focused on the micro-level, analysing internal communication practices and employee satisfaction, combining theoretical insights with empirical evidence from eThekwini Municipality during the disruption. Together, these objectives provided a coherent framework through which the research questions are addressed and the study's aims, both basic and applied, are achieved.

This chapter ends with an outline of the contributions and limitations of this study, before presenting the general conclusions of this thesis. The research questions and their associated sub-questions are addressed as logical sets, as encapsulated within each subproblem, as they deal with related phenomena. Therefore, in this chapter, each of the subproblems is discussed individually, grouping the related research questions thereunder and discussing the findings holistically within this structure.

It has been argued throughout this thesis that the institutional backdrop of public organisations has a bearing on their organisational culture and internal communication, which influences how internal communication is practised and managed. This thesis challenged the traditional and contemporary

study of internal communication satisfaction in public organisations by utilising a multidisciplinary and multidimensional analysis of the internal organisational communication practices of public organisations in general and particularly in the *eThekwini Municipality*, which is based in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province of South Africa. Moreover, this study has been conducted at a crucial juncture of political disruption in the South African local government environment. This study was conducted post-2016 local government elections, the point when the African National Congress's (ANC) reign in local government was crumbling. Hence, this study gauged the communication satisfaction of employees in one of the biggest metros in South Africa at a point where the ANC still managed to gain a hold of its reign.

The key findings indicate that the institutional environment affects organisational culture and communication satisfaction in the bureaucratically structured eThekwini Municipality. Of significance is that the findings corroborate with the literature asserting that although the structure and policies of the public organisation are fixed (self-structuring flow), the management styles and communication patterns (activity co-ordination flow) adopted within hierarchically organised institutions are dependent on the strategic implementation of these processes by superiors in key positions in the hierarchy (Monteiro & Adler 2021:441; Byrkjeflot & du Gay 2012:94; Suddaby 2011:157; Boxembaum & Jonsson 2008:79; Terry 2003:59; Aiken et al. 1980:636).

The findings indicated that the overall communication satisfaction of employees within the municipality as a whole is slightly dissatisfactory, with small variations in mean scores across clusters and constructs. Apart from the perceptions of the overall communication satisfaction of employees at eThekwini, the findings for each of the eight communication satisfaction constructs were provided against the backdrop of the institutional backdrop of public organisations. While there were some variations in the results, the overall sentiment for each of the constructs was dissatisfaction. The data revealed that the institutional environment affects organisational culture and communication satisfaction in the bureaucratically structured eThekwini Municipality. This is a significant finding considering the disruptive political context during which this research was conducted, which is the post-2016 municipal elections, when the ANC narrowly secured the leadership of eThekwini Municipality. This juncture indicates the point when the domination of the ANC started rapidly crumbling. The perceptions of employees in terms of their communication satisfaction provide an important gauge of the bearing that the institutional context has on internal communication satisfaction within public organisations that are deeply situated in their institutional environments. This view aligns with the central thesis statement of this study that organisations functioning in

extremely regulated contexts are not necessarily autonomous, as they are bound by institutional dynamics. Thus, this study addresses the research problem succinctly in the following sections.

6.1. THE OVERARCHING RESEARCH PROBLEM

This study aimed to address the following overarching research problem:

Through contextual, theoretical, and conceptual, as well as empirical enquiry, what insight can be gained into the bearing that forces, such as the institutional environment, have on the internal communication processes of public organisations and employees' satisfaction with the internal communication within public organisations in general and at the eThekwini Municipality specifically?

The overarching research problem, concerning the bearing of the institutional context on internal communication, is resolved by concluding that the acute Political-Administrative (P-A) disruption that occurred at eThekwini Municipality between March 2017 and September 2017, post-2016 municipal elections, was the fundamental institutional shock that compromised the administrative operating environment, thereby directly leading to the measured decline in employee communication satisfaction. This study addressed the research problem holistically, through contextual, theoretical, conceptual, and empirical enquiry. In doing so, the study used a multi-level and multi-disciplinary approach to provide insight into the research problem. Literature from various related fields was discussed and unpacked, leading to the conceptual framework that guided the empirical component of the study. Neo-institutional theory (NIT) provided the meta-theoretical framework, highlighting the preponderant role of the institutional environment in structuring and constituting public organisations.

This framework explained "why" public organisations are structured bureaucratically. To address the interest in "how" public organisations are structured, the literature review unpacked related and relevant public administration theories, discussing the bureaucratic organisation and culture of public organisations. Finally, organisational communication literature unpacked the interest in internal communication in public organisations. This section unpacked the communicative constitution of organisations (CCO) perspective first, aligning the concept of institutional logics to the intra-organisational functions of the public organisation through institutional messages. This perspective created the link between the macro world of institutions and the meso environment of the organisational field of local government organisations, with the micro world of intra-organisational communication and communication satisfaction. Hence, the study addressed these pertinent

aspects of the research problem and outlined each of the related research questions that this theoretical exploration unpacked and asserted the value of this multi-level understanding of internal communication satisfaction in public organisations.

Moreover, this study revealed that the institutional context is a significant aspect of local government organisation and functioning, which cannot be left out of the study of internal communication satisfaction in these organisations. As such, understanding the internal communication of the eThekwini Municipality required a deep analysis of its institutional background. This background was further complicated by the post-2016 political and administrative disruptions, which fragmented the communication climate. This is evidenced by the variance in communication satisfaction across clusters in this 2017 study. As discussed in Chapter Two, the institutional context of public organisations in South Africa is based on a three-tier system of governance that encapsulates the macro, meso, and micro levels of the environment within which local government institutions function. Each level of the institutional environment plays an important role in the constitution of the local government organisation and its communication processes, which were revealed in the theoretical and empirical appraisal of this pragmatic-interpretivist study. Each of the sub-problems and related research questions that arose from the overarching research problem has been addressed, as discussed in the sections below. The review of the research objectives is structured in sub-sections according to the sub-problems and related research questions outlined in Chapter 1 of this thesis. A birds-eye view of the overall research objectives, sub-problems, and related research questions appears in Table 6.1 below. Thereafter, each sub-problem will be addressed sequentially.

Table 6. 1: Sub-problems and related research questions

OBJECTIVE 1: THE MACRO-INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT		
Subproblem 1: *To determine the institutional context of public organisations theoretically, according to the literature, and empirically at eThekwini Municipality, and to determine the bearing this has on how their internal communication is managed.*		
RQ 1.1	Theoretical	What is the institutional context within which public organisations function?
RQ 1.2	Contextual	Within what regulative environment do local government organisations in South Africa and the eThekwini Municipality specifically function?
RQ 1.3	Theoretical and Contextual	What bearing does the institutional context have on how internal communication is managed in public organisations during periods of disruption?
RQ 1.4	Empirical	What bearing did the institutional context have on how internal communication was managed in eThekwini Municipality during the post-2016 municipal elections disruption (March–September 2017)?
OBJECTIVE 2: MESO-ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE		
Subproblem 2: *To determine the characteristics of the organisational culture within public organisations theoretically, according to the literature, and empirically at eThekwini Municipality, and to determine the bearing this has on their internal communication.*		
RQ 2.1	Theoretical and Contextual	What is the organisational culture of public organisations within which local municipalities function?
RQ 2.2	Theoretical and Contextual	What bearing does the organisational culture have on how internal communication is managed in public organisations?
RQ 2.3	Empirical	What bearing does the organisational culture have on how internal communication is managed in eThekwini Municipality during the post-2016 municipal elections disruption (March–September 2017)?
OBJECTIVE 3: MICRO-INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND SATISFACTION		
Subproblem 3: *To determine how internal communication is managed in public organisations theoretically, according to the literature, and empirically at eThekwini Municipality; and to determine the level of satisfaction of employees at the eThekwini Municipality with the internal communication.*		
RQ 3.1	Theoretical and Contextual	How are internal communication and communication satisfaction managed in public organisations?
RQ 3.2	Contextual	How was internal communication managed at eThekwini Municipality during the post-2016 municipal elections disruption (March–September 2017)?
RQ 3.3	Empirical	What was the level of satisfaction of employees at the eThekwini Municipality with its internal communication during the post-2016 municipal elections disruption (March–September 2017)?

6.2 OBJECTIVE 1: MACRO-INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Objective 1 aimed to establish the macro-institutional context of local government and its bearing on internal communication, with specific reference to the post-2016 municipal elections disruption at eThekwini Municipality. Sub-problem 1 operationalised this objective through Research Questions 1.1 to 1.4. Each is restated and answered below.

Sub-problem 1 addresses the following concern:
To determine the institutional context of public organisations theoretically, according to the literature, and empirically at eThekwini Municipality, and to determine the bearing this has on how their internal communication is managed.

As seen in Table 6.1, research questions 1.1 to 1.4 are closely related, in that the different aspects of the institutional context of public organisations, beginning from the general discussion thereof, to a specific link to internal communication, namely:

RQ 1.1: What is the institutional context within which public organisations function?
RQ 1.2: Within what regulative environment do local government organisations in South Africa and the eThekwini Municipality specifically function?
RQ 1.3: What bearing does the institutional context have on how internal communication is managed in public organisations during periods of disruption?
RQ 1.4: What bearing did the institutional context have on how internal communication was managed in eThekwini Municipality during the post-2016 municipal elections disruption (March–September 2017)?

In line with the pragmatic-interpretivist stance of this study, sub-problem 1 was addressed using a variety of methods that were pragmatically feasible, choosing the most appropriate methodological approach for answering particular research questions. This entailed theoretical, contextual, and empirical investigation. Research questions 1.1 and 1.3 were addressed in Chapter 3, the literature review, unpacking the literature related to the institutional context of public organisations and the bearing that this has on how communication is managed in these organisations. Chapter 2 addressed research question 1.2, addressing the regulative environment of public organisations and the eThekwini Municipality specifically. Research Question 1.4 was addressed in Chapter 5, considering the findings of the empirical part of the study that addressed the issue of the bearing

that the institutional context has on how internal communication is managed in eThekwini Municipality.

In answering research questions 1.1 and 1.3., through NIT literature in Chapter 3, it was identified that the institutional environment sets the tone for isomorphic trends in impersonal administration in public organisations, as it sets the boundaries for organisational structure and design (Chen & Rainey 2014:946; DiMaggio, Powell 1983:152). The institutional environment can be ascertained through an analysis of primary regulative and normative constraints (Scott, Meyer 1994:38). The institutional environment also has a role in communicatively constituting organisational culture (Brummans et al. 2014:174, Frederickson et al. 2012:109). It was identified that the institutional message allows institutional logics to flow into the organisation, facilitating the communicative constitution of public organisations as employees make sense of institutional requirements and translate them into behaviours, routines, and taken-for-granted conventions within the organisation (Little 2021; Cornelissen et al. 2015:21; Powell & Colyvas 2008:277).

The discussions in Chapter 2 identified that regulative frameworks determine the organisational structure, work design, power roles in the organisation, environmental interaction, and normative and cultural-cognitive frameworks. It also identified the three layers of the institutional environment of public organisations in general, which refer to the interdependent macro, meso and microenvironments. It was identified that the macro-level refers to processes external to the organisation, such as the wider societal, political, legal, and economic environments, at the national, regional, and/or international level that influence the creation and maintenance of public sector organisations. The meso level refers to the organisational field, sectoral or inter-organisational space, and elucidates the distinguishing features of the organisations that fall within the public sector, and specifically in the local government sector of South Africa for this study.

Finally, in answering research Question 1.2., a general overview of the South African government system as the institutional backdrop of local government organisations in South Africa and the influence this has on their structure and functioning was provided. This analysis addressed the issue of the institutional framework, in terms of the legislative backdrop of municipalities that sets out the criteria for structuring and managing their administrative functions, as was observed during the critical juncture of the post-2016 municipal elections and P-A disruptions. Thus, the deliberations on the three-tier governance structure in South Africa described the institutional framework of local government organisations in this context.

Finally, in answering research Question 1.2, Chapter Two zoomed in on the structuration of the eThekwini Municipality specifically as aligned with the overall institutional framework, bringing to the fore the intra-organisational policies that structure communication therein, which revealed the structural disconnect between legislative mandates and operational practice.

Finally, in answering research Question 1.4, in Chapter 5, through empirical investigation analysis, it was identified that the politically charged environment of the municipality leads to lower levels of communication satisfaction. This category is linked to the institutional positioning of the municipality that has a likely bearing on the organisational culture within eThekwini Municipality. The qualitative data revealed the highly bureaucratic and politicised nature of the organisation, which is a significant finding highlighting the influence of the institutional environment on communication satisfaction. The findings revealed that eThekwini Municipality displays the characteristic of differentiation between structure and activities in highly institutionalised local government organisations.

As a result, many processes and procedures within local government organisations merely become rituals or “rational myths” that do not necessarily enhance service delivery (Ongaro 2020:138; Weber 2001:123; DiMaggio & Powell 1983:147; Weber 1947:14). The data aligns with these arguments presented in the literature, as eThekwini Municipality approaches information dissemination as a rational myth, without strategically implementing effective work-related communication to its diverse employees. Hence, the data revealed dissatisfaction with this dimension of communication satisfaction.

Thus, sub-problem 1 has been adequately addressed in this research.

6.3 OBJECTIVE 2: MESO-ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Objective 2 was to establish the theoretical and empirical characteristics of organisational culture and its relationship with internal communication. Sub-Problem 2 operationalised this objective through Research Questions 2.1 to 2.3. Each is restated and answered below.

Sub-problem 2 addresses the following concern:

To determine the characteristics of the organisational culture within public organisations theoretically, according to the literature, and empirically at eThekwini Municipality, and to determine the bearing this has on their internal communication. These research questions dealt with the

organisational culture of public organisations and their influence on how internal communication is managed within these organisations, and specifically ask:

RQ 2.1: What is the organisational culture of public organisations within which local municipalities function?

RQ 2.2: What bearing does the organisational culture have on how internal communication is managed in public organisations?

RQ 2.3: What bearing does the organisational culture have on how internal communication is managed in eThekwini Municipality during the post-2016 municipal elections disruption (March–September 2017)?

In line with the pragmatic-interpretivist stance of this study, sub-problem 2 was addressed using a variety of methods that were pragmatically feasible, choosing the most appropriate methodological approach for answering particular research questions. This entailed theoretical, contextual, and empirical investigation. Research questions 2.1 and 2.3 were addressed in Chapter 3, the literature review, unpacking the literature related to the organisational culture of public organisations and the bearing that this has on how communication is managed in these organisations. Research question 2.3 was addressed in Chapter 5, dealing with the findings of the empirical part of the study that addressed the issue of the bearing that the organisational culture has on how internal communication is managed in eThekwini Municipality.

In answering research questions 2.1 and 2.3, through public administration literature in Chapter 3, it was identified that the public organisation's culture is a carrier of institutional values, which is in line with Scott and Meyer's (1994:19) view of the influence of institutional forces on constituting an organisation's culture or value system. An understanding of culture and its related "structuring influences" is thus indicative of the internal communication environment of local government organisations (Nicotera 2020:10; McAleese 2016:15; Alvesson 2013:5; Barker 2013:86; Schein 2010:14; Berkley & Rouse 2009:82; Christensen et al. 2007:38; Verwey & du Plooy-Cilliers 2003:135; Franks 1989:357). It was identified that organisational culture is displayed in the internal communication environment, such as channels of communication, working relationships, normative organisational behaviours, and other related communicative interchanges that have been influenced by institutional frameworks. It was also identified that structure influences the organisational culture within administrative bureaucracies (Little 2021; Christensen et al. 2007:45). Organisational structures, such as rules, policies, job descriptions, and organisational charts, create a framework

for formal and impersonal organisational processes in bureaucracies (Monteiro & Adler 2021:434; O'Riordan 2015:11; Chen & Rainey 2014:947; Franks 1989:327; Meyer & Scott 1983; Meyer & Rowan 1977).

Finally, in answering research question 2.3, in Chapter 5, through empirical investigation analysis, it was identified that trust, openness, and morale tend to have a negative statistical relationship with bureaucratic organisational cultures. This could come from the fact that larger organisations, typical within the public sector, are usually more structured and formalised and tend to portray impersonal, detached relationships (Jaafari et al. 2023:11; Hunt & Ivergard 2007:30; Pandey & Garnett 2006:40). This argument indicates that, as departments become larger, the communication becomes more impersonal. The data also revealed this characteristic and shed light on the variability in communication satisfaction between departments in relation to size. This is an important finding that needs to be explored further in future studies.

It was also deduced that the characteristics of classical organisation that continue in practice have a bearing on the organisational culture, climate, and ultimately communication satisfaction within administrative bureaucracies as they impress upon impersonal relationships, routinisation of activities, and focus on organisational goals above individual proclivities. Interpreting the qualitative and quantitative data in combination indicates that communication at eThekwini Municipality is established along the lines of these rigid bureaucratic structures and traditionally inflexible organisational structures that could likely obstruct effective internal communication practices and hamper employees' communication satisfaction if these processes become routinised and begin to reflect the organisational culture of the administration (Bente 2013:1714). Communication processes within bureaucratically structured organisations are, for the most part, authoritative, centralised, and favour pre-fixed norms and communication processes.

Thus, sub-problem 2 has been adequately addressed in this research.

6.4 OBJECTIVE 3: MICRO-INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND SATISFACTION

Objective 3 aimed to establish the theoretical and empirical status of internal communication and employee satisfaction. Sub-Problem 3 operationalised this objective through Research Questions 3.1 to 3.3**.** Each is restated and answered below.

Sub-problem 3 addresses the following concern:

To determine how internal communication is managed in public organisations theoretically, according to the literature, and empirically at eThekwini Municipality, and to determine the level of satisfaction of employees at the eThekwini Municipality with the internal communication.

In line with what is indicated above, research questions 3.1 to 3.3 ask:

RQ 3.1: How are internal communication and communication satisfaction managed in public organisations?

RQ 3.2: How was internal communication managed at eThekwini Municipality during the post-2016 municipal elections disruption (March–September 2017)?

RQ 3.3: What was the level of satisfaction of employees at the eThekwini Municipality with its internal communication during the post-2016 municipal elections disruption (March–September 2017)?

In line with the pragmatic-interpretivist stance of this study, sub-problem 3 was addressed using a variety of methods that were pragmatically feasible, choosing the most appropriate methodological approach for answering particular research questions. This entailed theoretical, contextual, and empirical investigation. Research question 3.1 was addressed in Chapter 3, the literature review, unpacking the literature related to how internal communication and communication satisfaction are managed in public organisations and the bearing that this has on how communication is managed in these organisations. Chapter 2 addressed research question 3.2, in terms of the issue of how communication is managed at the eThekwini Municipality specifically. Research question 3.3 was addressed in Chapter 5, dealing with the findings of the empirical part of the study that addressed the issue of the level of communication satisfaction at the eThekwini Municipality.

In answering research questions 3.1 and 3.2, through organisational communication literature in Chapter 3, it was identified that public organisations are communicatively constituted. Moreover, their organisational culture is constituted via communication that flows from various institutions. The notion of institutional rhetoric in perpetuating a culture of formalisation and impersonal administration, and the relevance of McPhee and Zaug's (2000) four flows of organisational communication model explain how public organisations are communicatively constituted. These notions create a conceptual link between NIT, public administration, and organisational communication literature for the study of communication satisfaction in public organisations, as will become apparent in the arguments that follow. It was also identified that although the structure and

policies of the public organisation are fixed (self-structuring flow), the management styles and communication patterns (activity co-ordination flow) adopted within hierarchically organised institutions are dependent on the strategic implementation of these processes by superiors in key positions in the hierarchy (Monteiro & Adler 2021:441; Byrkjeflot & du Gay 2012:94; Suddaby 2011:157; Boxembaum & Jonsson 2008:79; Terry 2003:59; Aiken et al. 1980:636). Pirrotta et al. (2024:2), Miller (2024:21), Miller (2015:15), Pugh and Hickson (2007:7) and Strati (2000:105) also made a case in point that is relevant to addressing these research questions. They stated that, although modern approaches to viewing organisations have evolved, the essential components of classical and human relations approaches are evident in contemporary public organisations and their associated communication processes. Finally, communication satisfaction literature points out that the pursuit of optimal organisational performance cannot be achieved without fostering an enabling environment for internal communication satisfaction (Pirrotta et al. 2024:4; Rafferty & Griffin 2009:197; Ehlers 2003:4).

It was also deduced that hierarchically organised organisational structures usually practice bureaucratic communication systems that emphasise vertical communication and formal lines of command and control (Pirotta et al. 2024:5; Juholin 2006:20). Government organisations are traditionally established along the lines of these rigid bureaucratic structures and traditionally inflexible organisational structures that could likely obstruct effective internal communication practices and hamper employees' communication satisfaction if these processes become routinised and begin to reflect the organisational culture of the administration (Bente 2013:1714). Communication processes within bureaucratically structured organisations are, for the most part, authoritative and centralised, and favour pre-fixed norms and communication processes. Finally, it was deduced that the characteristics of classical organisation that continue in practice have a bearing on the organisational culture, climate, and ultimately communication satisfaction within administrative bureaucracies as they impress upon impersonal relationships, routinisation of activities, and focus on organisational goals above individual proclivities.

Finally, in answering research question 3.3., in Chapter 5, through empirical investigation analysis, it was identified that the overall communication satisfaction of employees within the municipality as a whole is slightly dissatisfactory, with slight variations in mean scores across clusters and constructs. Apart from the perceptions of the overall communication satisfaction of employees at eThekwini, the findings and results for each of the eight communication satisfaction constructs were provided against the backdrop of the institutional backdrop of public organisations, which will be

referred to as findings henceforth. While there were some variations in the results, the overall sentiment for each of the constructs was dissatisfaction. The data revealed that the institutional environment affects organisational culture and communication satisfaction in the bureaucratically structured eThekwini municipality. Of significance is that the findings was the corroboration with the literature asserting that although the structure and policies of the public organisation are fixed (self-structuring flow), the management styles and communication patterns (activity co-ordination flow) adopted within hierarchically organised institutions are dependent on the strategic implementation of these processes by superiors in key positions in the hierarchy (Monteiro & Adler 2021:441; Byrkjeflot & Du Gay 2012:94; Suddaby 2011:157; Boxembaum & Jonsson 2008:79; Terry 2003:59; Aiken et al. 1980:636). This is a significant finding that indicates that, although the structure and policies of the public organisation are fixed (self-structuring flow), the management styles and communication patterns (activity co-ordination flow) adopted within hierarchically organised institutions are dependent on the strategic implementation of these processes by superiors in key positions in the hierarchy (Monteiro & Adler 2021:441; Byrkjeflot & Du Gay 2012:94; Suddaby 2011:157; Boxembaum & Jonsson 2008:79; Terry 2003:59; Aiken et al. 1980:636). In other words, despite the rigidity of bureaucratic organisation and structure, effective communication is possible through strategic planning and implementation.

Interpreting the qualitative and quantitative data in combination indicates that communication at eThekwini Municipality is established along the lines of these rigid bureaucratic structures and traditionally inflexible organisational structures that could likely obstruct effective internal communication practices and hamper employees' communication satisfaction if these processes become routinised and begin to reflect the organisational culture of the administration (Bente 2013:1714). Communication processes within bureaucratically structured organisations are, for the most part, authoritative, centralised, and favour pre-fixed norms and communication processes, which McPhee et al (2025:132) refer to as a form of "self-structuring", a term closely linked to isomorphism in NIT literature.

Thus, sub-problem 3 has been adequately addressed in this research.

6.5 SUMMARY OF THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Conducting an internal communication audit of a local municipality revealed employees' communication satisfaction levels within a highly institutionalised context and sets the stage for

further similar studies within local government entities in South Africa. The significance of this study is embedded in the fact that the internal communication of public organisations is approached as an interrelated component of institutional pressures, particularly after the disruptive 2016 municipal elections, which need to be considered when drafting internal communication improvement plans in this sector. In this way, future studies can adopt a more focused approach to enhancing communication within public organisations that are seated in bureaucratic constitutions due to institutional requirements.

The study also points to the fact that internal communication in public bureaucracies can be approached strategically, even within bureaucratic structuration, which stimulates further research in this area. Moreover, despite the recent growth in the juxtaposition between NIT and organisational communication scholarship, this research hails predominantly from Western countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, and Canada, signifying a dearth of scholarship from African and Asian countries (Abugre 2011:8; Hyden 2010:83; Scott 2008:5; Scott & Meyer 1994:31). This gap suggests a viable area for African scholars to pursue, particularly considering the intersection between NIT, public administration, and organisational communication research as enthused in this study.

Despite the significant body of knowledge generated by organisational communication scholars, little information has been generated to explain the trends in the structuring and functioning of public organisations, therefore a NIT lens for communication scholars to study the formal and informal communication structures of public organisations is suggested, particularly during periods of institutional disruptions, such as the P-A disruption at eThekwini Municipality following the 2016 local government elections(Heath et al. 2018; Bannerman & Haggart 2015:2; Suddaby, Seidl & Lê 2013:330; Sandhu 2009:75). Furthermore, although some research has been conducted in the area of internal communication in the public sector in South Africa (see for example Waititu & Du Plessis 2022; Sison 2020; Mbhele 2016; Tumbare 2009; Walt 2006; Holtzhausen 2002), none has been conducted within a multilevel and multidisciplinary approach. The main contribution of this study is, therefore, to add to the field of organisational communication literature by offering a multidimensional approach, both theoretically and empirically, to understanding and analysing internal communication in this sector, proposing a model to approach the study of internal communication in public organisations. It can therefore be established that the current study is unique with a clearly distinguished purpose that will add value to the limited body of knowledge that exists within the field

of internal organisational communication in the public sector in general, with pronounced emphasis on local government organisations in the South African context.

6.6 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Although steps have been taken to conduct unbiased, valid, and reliable research, specific limitations exist. However, these limitations can be addressed by future research. First, the population sample is described at one point in time. Therefore, causal relationships cannot be identified that may have preceded the state of the sample found at the time of the study. There are a number of limitations to this study, which point to the need for further study. Although the sample was selected via random selection, the response rate between clusters and units varied, which limited the generalisability of the results. Moreover, although the results of this study supported the reliability measures of the CSQ, the response rate between clusters and units varied. Additionally, even though correlations between communication satisfaction and job satisfaction, and communication satisfaction and productivity have been ascertained, the results do not confirm causality, nor do they show the direction of the relationship between these variables. Future research with longitudinal and experimental designs is required in order to provide more specific conclusions about the causal effects of internal communication satisfaction on job satisfaction and productivity.

Various paths for future research should therefore be considered to improve practice. Firstly, research on the topic of organisational communication practice, communication satisfaction and job satisfaction among staff members could be conducted over a long period of time to determine whether similar perceptions are maintained or changed in order to get a better understanding of what factors contribute the most to communication satisfaction for staff members. This knowledge could be used to develop effective strategies for the future.

Additionally, effective communication is crucial for many aspects of the organisation's proper functioning. Constant and ongoing evaluation of effective approaches and creating a communication practice plan for the organisation's departments or units through collaboration with other members of the organisation at all levels can aid in effective communication practices. The supervisors can provide better communication practices by creating an open-door policy, more face-to-face communication opportunities, the use of different mediums or channels of communication, trust, conveying feedback, and opportunities for their subordinates (staff) to interact, contribute, and participate in the process for improvement and coming up with solutions.

Similar research could also be conducted on other public organisations to look for patterns of similar themes, or in other municipalities to compare findings, particularly during periods of institutional disruptions. As such, further studies can be conducted to compare the communication satisfaction of employees at eThekwini Municipality after the 2021 and the upcoming 2026 municipal elections, using the proposed model presented in this thesis. Additionally, longitudinal studies in local government organisations can be carried out to gain more insight into their communication satisfaction over times of changing institutional environments.

6.7 CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

The analysis and findings reported in this study were organised around three objectives and their corresponding sub-problems, which were addressed through a series of related research questions. These were presented in Chapter 1 and discussed in detail in Chapter 6. Considering the pragmatic epistemological approach adopted for this study, different methods were used to answer the research questions and sub-questions, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Sub-problem 1, which addressed Objective 1 and focused on the macro-institutional context, comprised four research questions dealing with various aspects of the institutional context of public organisations and the bearing this has on internal communication.

Sub-problem 2, which addressed Objective 2 and examined the meso level organisational culture, included three sub-questions dealing with varying aspects of the organisational culture of public organisations and the bearing this has on internal communication.

Sub-problem 3, which addressed Objective 3 and analysed the micro-level internal communication and satisfaction, also included three sub-questions dealing with varying aspects of internal communication in public organisations. Research question 3.3 specifically dealt with the internal communication satisfaction of employees within the *eThekwini Municipality* for each of the eight communication satisfaction dimensions.

Apart from the perceptions of the overall communication satisfaction of employees at eThekwini, the findings and results, which will be referred to as findings henceforth, for each of the eight

communication satisfaction constructs were provided against the backdrop of the institutional environment of public organisations. While there were some variations in the findings, the overall sentiment for each of the constructs was dissatisfaction. The data revealed that the institutional environment affects organisational culture and communication satisfaction in the bureaucratically structured eThekwini Municipality. Of significance is that the findings corroborate the literature asserting that although the structure and policies of the public organisation are fixed (self-structuring flow), the management styles and communication patterns (activity co-ordination flow) adopted within hierarchically organised institutions are dependent on the strategic implementation of these processes by superiors in key positions in the hierarchy (Monteiro & Adler 2021:441; Byrkjeflot & du Gay 2012:94; Suddaby 2011:157; Boxembaum & Jonsson 2008:79; Terry 2003:59; Aiken et al. 1980:636). This is a significant finding that indicates that although the structure and policies of the public organisation are fixed (self-structuring flow), the management styles and communication patterns (activity co-ordination flow) adopted within hierarchically organised institutions are dependent on the strategic implementation of these processes by superiors in key positions in the hierarchy (Monteiro & Adler 2021:441; Byrkjeflot & du Gay 2012:94; Suddaby 2011:157; Boxembaum & Jonsson 2008:79; Terry 2003:59; Aiken et al. 1980:636). In other words, despite the rigidity of bureaucratic organisation and structure, effective communication is possible through strategic planning and implementation.

Finally, it can be deduced that public organisations adopt institutionally accepted ideals of organisational functioning due to a perception that these structures enhance rational and efficient functioning across the field in a general sense (Monteiro & Adler 2022:435; Thoenig 2012:189; Boxembaum & Jonsson 2008:80). Thus, the institutional context is an important element in the analysis of communication satisfaction in public organisations. The decision to focus the empirical investigation solely on the March 2017–September 2017 timeframe is a deliberate methodological strength rooted in the need to study the phenomenon of P-A disruption as a critical institutional incident. As such, the research reinforces that studying such specific crisis periods is vital for understanding how the integrity of the institutional context directly governs administrative efficacy, employee trust, and the quality of internal communication in public organisations. By collecting data during the disruption, the study obtained a reliable measure of employee perceptions and organisational functioning under duress, avoiding the potential for retrospective bias that occurs when interviewing subjects long after a crisis has stabilised. The tight temporal focus also controls for other long-term variables that might have influenced organisational culture or communication satisfaction. The period study also provides the empirical evidence required to measure the deviation

from the legally mandated administrative baseline (Chapter 2) and the intended bureaucratic ideals (Chapter 3). It shows the maximum point of institutional misalignment and administrative impairment, which serves as the most powerful case for testing the neoinstitutional theory (NIT) framework.

This chapter has restated and answered each research question, showing how the three objectives were achieved. The findings demonstrate that institutional context, organisational culture, and internal communication practices collectively shaped employee satisfaction during the post-2016 disruption at eThekwini Municipality. In doing so, the study fulfilled its dual aims: contributing to theory through neoinstitutional and organisational culture perspectives and offering applied insights for communication management in local government during periods of disruption.

LIST OF SOURCES CONSULTED

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ADDENDUM A: LETTER OF PERMISSION – ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY

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Tel: 012 429 4203
Email: satara@unisa.ac.za

SUBJECT: Permission granted for conducting research at the eThekwini Municipality

This is to confirm that eThekwini Municipality has granted Ms. Ashiya Abdool Satar from the University of South Africa (student number: 3309 4144) permission to conduct research in relation to her Master of Arts Degree in Communication Science at the aforementioned institution. The data collection will involve interviews and surveys with selected employees, as well as a perusal of selected policy documents outlining institutional and communication policies and strategies applicable to local government organisations.

TOZI MTHETHWA
HEAD: COMMUNICATIONS

ADDENDUM B: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNISA university of south africa

College of Human Sciences
Department of Communication Science
25 February 2017

Reference number: 2017_CHS_Staff_CommSt_004

Proposed title:
Understanding the communication experiences and job satisfaction of the employees within the Ethekwini Municipality

Principle investigator: Ms Ashiya Abdool Satar, Department of Communication Science

Approval status recommended by reviewers: Approved

The Ethics Review Committee of the College of Human Sciences at the University of South Africa has reviewed the research proposal and considers the methodological, technical and ethical aspects of the study to be appropriate.

Ms Ashiya Abdool Satar is requested to maintain the confidentiality of all data collected from or about research participants, and maintain security procedures for the protection of privacy. The committee needs to be informed should any part of the research methodology as outlined in the Ethics application (Ref. Nr.2017_CHS_ Staff_CommSt_004) change in any way.

It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Research Ethics Policy, which can be found at the following website:
http://staffcmsys.unisa.ac.za/cmsys/staff/contents/departments/res_policies/docs/Policy%20on%20Research%20Ethics%20-%20rev%20appr%20-%20Council%20-%2015.09.2016.pdf

This certificate is valid for two years.

Sincerely

Prof K Khan
Chair: Departmental Research Committee
Department of Communication Science

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
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ADDENDUM C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

THE INTERVIEW

- **Introduction**

Begin the interview with an ice-breaker (such as personal introductions, etc.)

- **Begin asking the questions**

Jot down important themes that come to the fore that will be useful for analysing the data later. Allow a conversation to take place between interviewer and interviewee, guiding and facilitating the conversation according to the plan.

A ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

How would you describe the organisational culture in the municipality? (In other words the personality/ atmosphere of the organisation)

(Possible probing questions)

- *Is it a personal place? Like an extended family? Or is it a very controlled and structured place? Do people seem to share a lot of themselves? Why do you say so?*
- *Do formal procedures generally govern what people do? Why do you say so?*
- *Which formal policies assist in structuring the municipality as a whole? Which policies assist you in structuring your unit and the department?*
- *Are these policies clear and concise? Do you have to make some of your own decisions when implementing some policies to ensure smooth operations in your unit and department?*

(Possible sub-themes to probe)

A.1 Organisational leadership

What type of leadership is considered the norm in the municipality?

(Possible probing questions)

- *Would you describe the leadership in the organisation as facilitating a mentoring and nurturing environment **or** does the type of leadership emphasise coordinating, organising, or smooth-running efficiency? Why do you say so?*

- *Why is this leadership style dominant? Please elaborate.*

A.2 Communication process

How would you describe the communication process in the municipality?

(Possible probing questions)

- *Would you say that the commination processes **emphasises trust, openness, and participation?***
- *Or would you describe the communication as formal and routine? What formal policies are there in place to ensure the efficient and predictable operations? Why do you say so?*
- *In your view, how would you describe the communication between departments? Explain why you say so?*
- *How do you communicate with your staff? Which channel of communication do you use? Why?*
- *How does your staff communicate with you? Why?*
- *Would you say this is the same way people communicate in the department as a whole? What about the other units and departments?*
- *What policies structure communication processes within this municipality? What about national policies that guide municipal communication strategies and structures?*

A.3 Authority/Power (management of employees)

How would you characterise the management style in the organisation?

(Possible probing questions)

- *Does the management style characterise teamwork and participation **or** would you say management style is characterised by conformity (adhering to policies) to ensure predictable operations and stabile relationships?? Why do you say so?*
- *How are decisions made in the organisation? Who makes these decisions within your unit and the department? Is this always the way things are done? Why?*
- *How important are formal rules and policies to the success of the organisation?*

- *Which policies help you to coordinate the activities of your unit and the department? Which policies help to structure the tasks and jobs in your unit and the department? Would the same policies assist in structuring the municipality as a whole?*

B COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION

What do you personally understand from the term communication satisfaction?

(Possible probing questions)

- *How would you describe the following: 1) Quality of interactions, 2) Quality and usefulness of information, 3) Channels of communication (how information flows in the organisation)?*
- *What would you change in your working environment, given the opportunity, to increase your communication satisfaction within the organisation?*
- *How does your unit deal with non-routine requests in your unit? In other words, requests and queries that policy does not cover, nor does experience within your unit/department address? What is the municipality's view on dealing with these activities?*

Thank you for your participation….. Your cooperation is highly appreciated.

ADDENDUM D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE: *ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY*

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

This informed consent form is for employees of the EThekwini Municipality who we are inviting to participate in this research study that deals with the communication experiences and job satisfaction of the employees within the EThekwini Municipality.

This informed consent form has two parts:

1 Information sheet (to share information about the study with you)

2 Certificate of consent (for signatures if you choose to participate)

You can keep the information sheet with you, but you need to return the signed certificate of consent form to the researcher

PART 1: INFORMATION SHEET

Dear Participant,

We are herewith inviting you to participate in this research project that studies your communication experiences at the EThekwini Municipality. This questionnaire asks a variety of questions about your perceptions of the communication within your organisation.

The results of this research will help management to make better-informed decisions regarding internal communications at the EThekwini Municipality.

As a participant of this research study, be assured of your anonymity and the confidentiality of the information that you provide during this study (meaning that your answers will not be identified with you personally). Therefore, please feel free to express your **personal opinions** about your communication experiences in the EThekwini Municipality

We will not be sharing information about you to anyone outside of the research team, the supervisors and examiners. The information that we collect from this research project will be kept private. Any information about you will have a number on it instead of your name.

Your participation is also completely voluntary and there is no penalty if you do not participate. It is your choice whether to participate or not. If you choose to participate, kindly fill in the certificate of consent attached. You may change your mind later and stop participating even if you agreed earlier.

I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part. It is possible that you may share some personal or confidential information by chance or that you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. However, we do not wish for this to happen. You do not have to answer any questions or take part in the survey

If you feel the question(s) are too personal or if talking about them makes you uncomfortable. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions included in the survey, you may skip them and move on to the next question.

Additionally, there will be no direct benefit to you, but your participation is likely to help us find out more about how to prevent and treat malaria in your community).

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of Unisa, which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm.

If you need any further information about this study, you can contact Mrs Ashiya Abdool Satar on 012 429 4203 0r satara@unisa.ac.za

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the certificate of consent

PART 2: CERTIFICATE OF CONSENT

I……agree to participate in Mrs Ashiya Abdool Satar's research study titled, "*Understanding the communication experiences and job satisfaction of the employees within the eThekwini Municipality".*

.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing. I voluntarily consent to participate.

I give permission for my responses provided in the questionnaire to be utilised for this study

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I have had an opportunity for my questions to be answered.

I understand that if I have questions about this research project or my rights as a respondent, I may contact Mrs Ashiya Abdool Satar.

Signed……. Date…….

ADDENDUM E: COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE (CSQ)

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Participant,

Thank you for participating in this study.

As a participant of this research study, be assured of your anonymity and the confidentiality of the information that you provide during this study. Please feel free to express your **personal opinions** about your communication experiences in your workplace.

This is **NOT** a test. You are encouraged to express your personal opinions freely by choosing the option to each question that expresses your views most accurately. Kindly answer all the questions in the questionnaire.

Please feel free to ask for clarity on any issue.

Ms. Ashiya Abdool Satar
satara@unisa.ac.za
012 429 4203

IMPORTANT:

Before you continue kindly tick or cross the following box to indicate that you are providing permission to participate in this study. You can withdraw any time as your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your identity as well as all the information you provide will be kept confidential. Please put a cross in the box that applies to you.

☐ **Yes, I am willing to participate in this study** **[1]**

No, I am not willing to participate in this study ☐ **[0]**

Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire
Cal W. Downs and Michael D. Hazen
Copyright, 1973

INTRODUCTION
Most of us assume that the quality and amount of communication in our jobs contribute to both our job satisfaction and our productivity. Through this study we hope to find out how satisfactory our communication practices are, and what suggestions you have for improving them.
We appreciate your taking the time to complete the questionnaire. Hopefully, you should be able to complete it in 10-15 minutes.
Your answers are completely confidential, so be as frank as you wish. This is not a test – your opinion is the only answer. Do not sign your name; we do not wish to know who you are. The answers will be combined into groups for reporting purposes.

1. How satisfied are you with your job? (**Select one option only**)

Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Indifferent	Somewhat satisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. In the past 6 months, what has happened to your level of satisfaction? (**Select one option only**)

Stayed the same	Gone up	Gone down
1	2	3

3. If the communication associated with your job could be changed in any way to make you more satisfied, please indicate how.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

SECTION A: INTERNAL COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCES

Please select the appropriate option by circling the appropriate number.
Only select **ONE** option for each question unless instructed otherwise.

Listed below are several kinds of information often associated with a person's job

A AMOUNT OF INFORMATION YOU RECEIVE [Q4 – Q17]

Please indicate how satisfied you are with the amount *and/or* quality of each kind of information listed below

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Slightly satisfied	Neutral	Slightly dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
4 Information about my progress in my job	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5 Personnel news	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6 Information about organisational **policies** *and* **goals** related to the ***municipality*** as whole	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7 Information about how my job compares with others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8 Information about how I am being judged	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9 Recognition of my efforts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10 Information about ***departmental*** policies and goals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11 Information about the requirements of my job	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12 Information about government action affecting the municipality	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13 Information about relations with unions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14 Reports on how problems in my job are being handled	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15 Information about employee benefits and pay	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16 Information about municipal profits and financial standing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

17 Information about the accomplishments and/or failures of the municipality faces	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

B **YOUR SENTIMENTS/ FEELINGS [Q18 – Q38]**

Please indicate how you satisfied you are with the following:

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Slightly satisfied	Neutral	Slightly dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
18 Extent to which my superiors **know** and **understand** the problems faced by subordinates	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19 The municipality's communication motivates and stimulates an enthusiasm for meeting its goals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20 My supervisor listens and pays attention to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21 The people in my organisation have great ability as communicators	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22 Extent to which my supervisor offers guidance for solving job related problems	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23 The municipality's communication makes me identify with or feel like a vital part of it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24 Company publications are interesting and helpful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25 Extent to which my supervisor trusts me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26 Information needed to do my job is received on time	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27 Extent to which conflicts are handled appropriately through proper communication channels	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28 Extent to which the grapevine is active in our organisation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29 Extent to which my supervisor is open to ideas	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30 Communication with my colleagues in other units/departments is accurate and free-flowing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
31 Communication practices are adaptable to emergencies	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32 My work group is compatible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

33 Our meetings are well organised	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
34 The amount of supervision given to me is about right	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
35 Written directives and reports are clear and concise	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
36 The attitudes toward communication at the municipality are basically healthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
37 Informal communication is active and accurate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
38 Extent to which the amount of communication in the municipality is about right	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

C YOUR PRODUCTIVITY [Q39 – Q41]

Please tell us how you feel about your productivity on your job by answering the three questions below

39 How would you rate your productivity in your job? (**Select one option only**)

Very low	Low	Slightly lower than most	Average	Slightly higher than most	High	Very high
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

40 In the past 6 months, what has happened to your level of productivity? (**Select one option only**)

Stayed the same	Gone up	Gone down
1	2	3

41 If the communication associated with your job could be changed in any way to make you more **productive**, please indicate how.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

D *****QUESTIONS FOR MANAGERS ONLY [Q42 – Q46]

Answer the following only if you are a manager or supervisor. Then indicate your satisfaction with the following:

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Slightly satisfied	Neutral	Slightly dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
42 Extent to which my subordinates are responsive to downward directive communication	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

43 Extent to which my subordinates anticipate my needs for information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
44 Extent to which I ***do not*** have a communication overload	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
45 Extent to which my subordinates are receptive to evaluation, suggestions, and criticisms	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
46 Extent to which my subordinates feel responsible for initiating accurate upward communication	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

SECTION B: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please select the appropriate option by placing a tick in the allocated box.

Only select **ONE** option for each question unless instructed otherwise.

47 **Identify your age group from the categories provided below.**

☐ 20 or younger [1] ☐ 30-39 [3] ☐ 50-59 [5]

☐ 21-29 [2] ☐ 40-49 [4] ☐ 60 and older [6]

48 **Please indicate which cluster and department you work in**

a) Cluster: _____

b) Department: _____

49 **What position do you hold in this municipality?**

_____

50 **Please indicate your current job level**

☐ Upper mangement [1] ☐ Middle management [2]

☐ Supervisor [3] ☐ Generalist worker [4]

☐ Ground worker [5] ☐ Administration [6]

☐ Other [7] (Please indicate) _____

51 **Provide a brief description of your job.**

_____

52 **How long have you worked at the municipality?**

_____

53 **Please indicate your highest qualification?**

☐ Primary school (Grades 1-7) [1]

☐ High school (Grades 8-12) [2]

☐ Diploma [3]

☐ Degree [4]

☐ Postgraduate Degree [5]

☐ Other [6] (please indicate) _____

Thank you for participating in this research. Your willingness and time are highly appreciated.

Kind regards,
Ashiya Abdool Satar

ADDENDUM F: PERMISSION TO USE THE CSQ

From: Cal Downs
To: Abdool Satar, Ashiya
Subject: Re: FW: PERMISSION TO USE THE COMMNUICATION SATISFACTION QUESTIONAIRRE (CSQ)
Date: 15 July 2016 18:23:12

Dear Ms. Abdool-Satar:

I am happy to give your permission to use the Comsat for your study under the following conditions.

1. This permission is for one study only.
2. The Questionnaire will be used only for academic study and may not be used for consulting.
3. Copyright citations will be on the questionnaire and in all references to it.
4. The factor key will not be published in any document because anyone could then pick up the questionnaire and use it for their own purposes. This provision is MOST IMPORTANT. It means the factor key cannot be published in your thesis.
5. A copy of the study will be sent to me.

Since the published questionnaire that you have, I have added two other factors of 5 questions each if you would like to consider them.

I also have a short 9 item questionnaire on organizational commitment which I have used to analyze how the comsat factors impact organizational commitment. This is a link that I have studied for many years and I would welcome new data if you wished to use it and perhaps co-author an article with me based on your data. Please note that my permission to use the original questionnaire is not contingent on your agreeing to do this, but it is merely an invitation to do more.

Please send me a letter agreeing to these conditions.

I wish you well in your study, and I applaud you for what you are trying to accomplish.

Cal W. Downs, Ph.D
Communication Management, Inc.
785-550-9080

ADDENDUM G: QUESTIONNAIRE RELIABILITY (CHAPTER 6)

QUESTIONNAIRE RELIABILITY – CRONBACH'S ALPHA PER CONSTRUCT: ITEM-TOTAL CORRELATIONS

Table 4. 10: Item total correlation the climate construct

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q19	.664	.855
Q21	.693	.848
Q23	.748	.835
Q26	.668	.854
Q27	.730	.839

Table 4. 11: Case processing summary for the climate construct

		N	%
Cases	Valid	299	95.2
	Excluded	15	4.8
	Total	314	100.0

Table 4. 12: Item total correlation the horizontal and informal communication construct

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q28	.531	.834
Q30	.673	.797
Q31	.747	.776
Q32	.685	.794
Q37	.575	.823

Table 4. 13: Case processing summary for the horizontal and informal construct

		N	%
Cases	Valid	293	93.3
	Excluded[a]	21	6.7
	Total	314	100.0

Table 4. 14: Item total correlation the subordinate communication construct

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q42	.810	.887
Q43	.810	.887
Q44	.604	.926
Q45	.826	.884
Q46	.848	.879

Table 4. 15: Case processing summary for the subordinate communication construct

		N	%
Cases	Valid	115	36.6
	Excluded[a]	199	63.4
	Total	314	100.0

Table 4. 16: Item total correlation the organisational (corporate) perspective construct

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q6	.562	.838
Q12	.704	.800
Q13	.664	.812
Q16	.657	.813
Q17	.680	.807

Table 4. 17: Case processing summary for the organisational (corporate) perspective construct

		N	%
Cases	Valid	297	94.6
	Excluded[a]	17	5.4
	Total	314	100.0

Table 4. 18: Item total correlation the organisational integration construct

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q4	.694	.806
Q5	.643	.820
Q10	.678	.810
Q11	.727	.797
Q15	.542	.845

Table 4. 19:Case processing summary for the organisational integration construct

		N	%
Cases	Valid	299	95.2
	Excluded[a]	15	4.8
	Total	314	100.0

Table 4. 20:Item total correlation the media quality construct

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q24	.573	.838
Q33	.671	.814
Q35	.712	.802
Q36	.622	.833
Q38	.743	.797

Table 4. 21:Case processing summary for the media quality construct

		N	%
Cases	Valid	303	96.5
	Excluded[a]	11	3.5
	Total	314	100.0

Table 4. 22:Item total correlation the communication with superiors construct

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q20	.793	.881
Q22	.808	.878
Q25	.755	.890
Q29	.766	.887
Q34	.720	.896

Table 4. 23: Case processing summary for the communication with superiors construct

		N	%
Cases	Valid	298	94.9
	Excluded[a]	16	5.1
	Total	314	100.0

Table 4. 24: Item total correlation for the personal feedback construct

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q7	.688	.889
Q8	.779	.870
Q9	.784	.869
Q14	.768	.872
Q18	.730	.881

Table 4. 25: Case processing summary for the personal feedback construct

		N	%
Cases	Valid	294	93.6
	Excluded	20	6.4
	Total	314	100.0